

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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**CHILDRENS BOOKS & POLITICS**  
**HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN**  
**AUTHORGRAPH: JAN MARK**

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## Cover Book

On our cover this month we feature an illustration from **The Swineherd**, a picture book version of the Andersen fairy tale by artist Lisbeth Zwerger. (Neugebauer Press, 0 907234 127, £3.95 from A. and C. Black). We are grateful to A. and C. Black for help in using this illustration.

The roundel used on the Hans Andersen pages is from the wood engraving by Gwen Raverat for Four Tales, translated by R. P. Keigwin, C.U.P. (1935).

It and the Punch cartoon on page 16 appear in Brian Alderson's pamphlet **Hans Christian Andersen and his Eventyr in England**.



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# EDITOR'S PAGE



Of course! We see it now. We should have known. The people to blame for the shortage of books in schools are . . . the teachers. And there we were thinking it had something to do with central government funding. It was the Secretary of State for Education, Sir Keith Joseph himself, who put us right. There was quite enough in the rate support grant for local authorities to provide a reasonable supply of books, he told the House of Commons Select Committee on Education. But the teachers' unions asked for more than was set aside in the budgets; the local authorities accepted the claim and that's where the book money went. 'It's been going on for years,' said Sir Keith. Perhaps it would be a good idea to separate teachers' salaries from capitation? Well, no. Sir Keith thought *that* would require him to behave like a dictator.

A story which makes a neat (though not planned) complement to one of the main themes of this issue of BfK: **Children's Books and Politics**. There's a growing debate about the appearance of so-called 'political' ideas in children's books. Is it suitable? Is it advisable? A number of recently published books deal explicitly with subjects like racism, terrorism, revolution and counter revolution, nuclear war and nuclear disarmament, the police. Their titles and the names of their authors crop up frequently in discussions on the subject. Are these 'political' books? If so, what is a 'non-political' book? Time, we thought, to give the subject some space.

To start things off we asked **Robert Leeson** to take a general view and put the whole issue in some kind of perspective. (See page 4) Bob Leeson is a thoughtful, balanced and informed commentator as well as a writer of books which children of all ages enjoy reading. (Just out is *Genie on the Loose*, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11177 3, £5.75, a very entertaining sequel to *The Third Class Genie*, and promised for the autumn is a new survey of children's literature, from Collins.) To follow his beginning we invited two writers, **James Watson** and **Jan Needle**, who have frequently had the label 'political' attached to their work to write about their approach to writing for children and young people and what they feel about 'politics and Children's Books'. (See page 6) I think you'll find what they have to say is very interesting and stimulating. Later this year we will be featuring an annotated list of books, fiction and non-fiction, which deal with overtly political ideas. Meanwhile we'd be glad to hear what *you* think about this subject and of your experiences with specific books.

## The Marvellous Storyteller

The second theme in this issue — **Hans Christian Andersen** — would be, we thought, a far cry from politics. We should have known that that particular subject is all pervasive. There was **Naomi Lewis**, one of three Andersen experts in this issue, telling us about Andersen's shoemaker father, 'a free-thinker, a political rebel who had a bit of genius'. He made toy theatres for his son and was perhaps partly responsible for Andersen's totally original vision, 'his ability to see the comedy of life and express it in terms of the kitchen and the toy cupboard, giving life to spoons and darning needles'.

Nor, we heard from **Patricia Crampton**, can you escape from politics when making an international award like the Hans Andersen Medal. (See page 16) IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People, which originated the award is dedicated to promoting greater understanding among children of the world through children's books. As part of this IBBY designated April 2nd, Hans Andersen's birthday, International Children's Book Day, and invites libraries, schools, organisations all over the world to celebrate it in any way they choose. Why not join in?

## Nominated

The Hans Andersen Award is given, every two years, to an author and an illustrator who is judged to have made a lasting contribution to literature for children and young people. It is a great honour to be nominated. This BfK features two people whose work will this year be the subject of consideration by Patricia Crampton's jury. **Jan Mark**, our 25th Authorgraph (page 12), has been selected as the British nomination for the Author Medal. (**Raymond Briggs** is the nominee for the Illustrator's Medal, and



Lorenz Froelich, says Brian Alderson, is perhaps the greatest of all Andersen illustrators, although his work was done mainly for later, less well known stories. This pen drawing to 'The Snail and the Rosebush' has been used in a new translation *Tales & Stories by Hans Christian Andersen* by Patricia Conroy and Sven Rosell (Washington University Press, 0 295 95936 3, £9.50 paperback).

This volume has been prepared with adults in mind as much as children and is furnished with prefatory material, notes and a bibliography. The preface on translation is full of interest but the actual performance by these two scholars is rather wooden and lacking in verve.

three books have been chosen for an Honour List: for writing, William Mayne's *All the King's Men* (Cape), for illustration, Anthony Browne's *Hansel and Gretel* (Julia MacRae Books), for translation, Elizabeth Watson Taylor, *The Magic Inkstand* from the German of Heinrich Seidel (Cape.) And to celebrate the international flavour of this issue we have on our cover the work of **Lisbeth Zwerger**, the Austrian nomination for the Illustrator's Medal. (See page 21) Lisbeth, we discovered, spends quite a lot of time here and very recently married an Englishman, John Rowe, whom she has known for many years. At the moment they are looking for somewhere to live in this country, though, John says, they will still be spending a good deal of time in Vienna.

## Words and Pictures

**Brian Alderson**, well-known for speaking his mind, is a useful irritant in the world of children's books. (He's had some rude things to say about the SBA and BfK in the past.) Andersen is one of his particular specialisms and we decided to give him his head on what the English had done to these Danish stories. (See page 22) Brian, I think, like Andersen himself perhaps, prefers his Tales unillustrated, and lavish picture book versions of the stories don't usually arouse an enthusiastic response in him. That, of course, doesn't stop publishers bringing them out. We feature the two newest (page 20) for you to make up your own mind. The text for one of them, *The Wild Swans*, is by Naomi Lewis, whose versions come with the Alderson seal of approval. Naomi Lewis's own childhood recollections of Andersen suggest she too might find illustration superfluous. 'I had this little edition, no space between the stories, thin paper, no pictures. But I never realised at the time there were no pictures because I think they are so visual.'

Her infectious and intense enthusiasm, like Erik Haugaard's, (page 18) should send many of us adults scurrying back to Andersen. 'I read the stories constantly but now I'm seeing things in them which, of course, I didn't see as a child. I discover things all the time.'

## CBY will be back

Good news about something else which should help us to new discoveries. The NBL has announced that **Children's Books of the Year** will be re-introduced from Summer 1985 as an annual event. The catalogue will be published by the NBL with financial support from the Eva Reckitt Trust, and the selection of approximately 300 books will be made by Julia Eccleshare, currently a children's editor at Hamish Hamilton. One departure from the old format is that books will be chosen from those published between April 1st and March 31st instead of from a calendar year. The exhibition and publication, as before, will be in July/August.

If you can't wait that long the next issue of BfK is our annual Picture Book Special and includes a selection of the best of '84, so far. See you then.

Pat

“Neither traditionally, nor rationally is there a case for saying that politics are alien to children’s literature.”

Robert Leeson considers the idea of

# CHILDREN’S BOOKS & POLITICS



‘Children’s books seem to be very political these days’, I overheard someone remark at a conference. I think I know what they were talking about. In the past year we have had novels giving the once over to the police, the army, dictatorship, indoctrination, disarmament, nationalism, direct action and hijacking.

What did this person mean, though? I could only guess. The tone did not suggest approval, but rather what would Mole and Pooh think about all this?

Part of the problem is what do we mean by children’s books? The field is vast. It includes reading matter for a tremendous age range, from those just walking and talking, to those breaking the barriers of the age of consent, the driving licence, the dole giro and the vote. And it is not always easy to determine where one sort of young person gives way to another, not in a world of instant communication to the heart of the family home.

The BBC lays down that John Craven’s Newsround should not

show for example, police struggling with pickets or football fans. But if the set is left on for 20 minutes longer, the early evening news will reveal all.

This is not to say the BBC is an ass, but to say that the notion of ‘children’ and ‘children’s books’ as a single uniformly protected area, like a nature reserve, is not a viable proposition. Nor is it a desirable one, in my opinion. The readership of these books is not an adult audience, it is not *any* audience. This is not a free for all — I write what I please and scream censorship if you object. But neither is it a ‘no go’ area.

The notion of children’s books as a ‘no go’ area, is not as traditional as some might think. Nor is the notion of children’s books as a suitable place for the dramatisation of fundamental ideas of justice, liberty, wealth, poverty, something thought up by late 20th century trendies.

Two hundred years ago, 150 years ago, it was not unusual for writers of children’s books to deal with such matters as slavery, land enclosure, the follies of the rich and idle, and the wickedness of war. One magazine complained that the villains were too often

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grasping landlords or cruel workhouse overseers. But these matters since they were part of life, were a legitimate source of drama for stories.

During Victorian times, with the development of a 'nursery' literature, some subjects became taboo, but the best authors considered the larger world to be their parish. In the so-called First Golden Age of late 19th century, writers like George MacDonald and Edith Nesbit had no hesitation in discussing what some might think to be very political matters. Some Nesbit admirers might be surprised to hear, in *The Amulet*, the assertion that the vote is given to the poor to keep them quiet (and this from the mouth of a child, too).

Only in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, did the idea of a completely protected literature, with the centre of gravity for suitability round about the 8-10 age range, become dominant. When Enid Blyton died, the *Daily Mail*, looking back on the near 50 years of her writing career praised her because whatever went on in the world, her books remained the same.

Yet it is also recognised that this period was a low point in the history of the literature. It recovered its standards and its vigour after the Second World War.

This was when we began to see historical novels about real history and people, not as someone once remarked, about 'armies composed entirely of officers'; school stories about real schools, and family novels about real homes, of every kind, not just the Christopher Robin plus Nannie sort. While on this topic, one must recall that the bizarre restriction of the school story to the subject of private boarding schools, conveyed a message (that other schools and children don't count) which is intensely 'political'.

Ah, some will say, you are discussing realist books. And of course, there must be such, but the true heart of children's literature is the fantasy, wizards, giants, enchantments and all that, not social issues.

Beware fantasy! Fantasy is the most philosophical, the most ideological, the most political of forms of writing. It is in fantasy, in the creation of other worlds in the author's imagination that ideas about the real world, consciously or unconsciously, have the freest play. And it is from fantasy that the young reader may most readily, in the long term, absorb ideas about how the world ought to be. This is true of Thackeray, Nesbit, MacDonald. It is also (Sorry Mole) true about Kenneth Grahame. If you think *Wind in the Willows* is an innocent tale of animals, read Peter Green's biography and get a sense of the inner social fears of class struggle and disorder, of an author who was also Secretary of the Bank of England. It is true of C. S. Lewis, J. P. Martin, Richard Adams, and any number of others.

A fantasy which makes an impact must be full of ideas. Arch fantasist Lewis Carroll deliberately makes his heroine question and overturn all she had been told. If there is a subversive book (or books, rather) it is the Alice saga.

Lewis Carroll a secret Red? Well, it is true that he did believe, in advance of most dons, that women should have the right to go to university. But no. It is a common error among those who favour the status quo, that politics equals subversion, or that anything that disturbs them is 'politics' while what they believe is simply natural.

Once, during a radio interview, I praised Winifred Cawley's *Gran at Coalgate*, the story of a girl staying with her grandmother during the General Strike.

'Oh', interrupted the interviewer, 'I don't think children want to read about politics'.

When people say 'children don't want to read...' they mean 'I don't think they ought to read...'

In fact, though, Winifred Cawley was writing a personal story, and using the General Strike as a natural backdrop to it. Now the General Strike is of great importance in the history of many working class people. On the millions who lived in mining areas during the 1920s and 1930s, it had a far greater impact than say, for example, the Coronation. Yet had I cited a book about a girl coming to London during the Coronation, I doubt if any interviewing eyebrows would have been raised. The Crown, the monarch are above politics, the miners, the unions are not.

Yet is the Queen above politics? Earlier this year she suggested that there was an unacceptable gap between rich and poor nations. That was a basically human conclusion that anyone working in the field of children's literature would regard as unexceptional. In fact she was attacked by Enoch Powell and the Editor of *The Times* for an ill-advised intrusion into politics.

Humanity, the raw material of children's books, can thus become politics. In these times, to remain human, to share the right to be human with every creature in the world, may well be 'political'. And if we do not involve the younger generation in consideration of ideas about the way the world goes, while they are growing up, what sort of adults will they make?

Neither traditionally, nor rationally is there a case for saying that politics are alien to children's literature. What counts is what is the writer conveying, realistically, fantastically, consciously or unconsciously. If one were to take the writers whose work I have mentioned, specifically or in passing, and apply the Gallup Poll to them, some would fall to the left some to the right and some among the don't knows. But what they believe in, their world view, is expressed in their writing.

What then should the reader, the intermediary, parent, teacher, librarian, expect of them?

I think, first, that they aim for the truth. Any writer who says 'I show the world as it is', is, of course, guilty of enormous conceit. The 'world as it is' is far too complex for any of us to capture. But we must and do seek honestly to show what makes people tick, what makes them laugh or cry, love or hate, suffer or die. Growing up is a matter of striving and learning. Adults who look back carefully at their own lives will recall how much they learned, how much they were encouraged, at second hand, by a writer whom they never met, but who once, in a flash, made something real and clear for them, for the first time. Or, along with other writers, helped his readers to make up their own minds about things, a vital part of the process of growing up. (Like the 'take nothing for granted' message of 'Alice' for instance).

Thus a writer may take any issue and say something of value to a young audience. If the writer, however, bends events, characters, suppresses crucial information about them, to achieve a particular end, then both aesthetic and moral alarm bells start to ring.

Whether taken from the large world of 'politics' or the small world of family or friends, the issues in any story eventually boil down to the most fundamental moral questions, not so much Left or Right, as right or wrong. It is the moral heart of the book which determines whether we value it, not the way we think the author votes.

On a personal note, when children read my books, I am being taken into the home, along with the parent. I have ideas, an outlook, a sense of justice, a wish that human beings should work together for the good of all, and a knowledge that they don't always; an experience of life, the funny and the not so funny side. It's something I share with many parents and teachers. As a writer I offer it to their children without taking liberties. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the writer must be judged not on the theme, but on what the writer says.

As a citizen the writer may be active in politics, which are a compromise between certain groups of human beings, banded together as they see it to set matters right. Politics in that sense do not make books. But the root and raw material of politics and literature are the same. The writers' words, like the political actions of their fellow citizens must ultimately be judged by the same human, moral standards.

A concern at the way the world goes is a sure sign that the heart of children's literature is alive and beating strongly. ●



**Robert Leeson** has written nineteen books for young people from 8-18 years of age. Among these are historical novels like *Bess* (Fontana Lions, 0 00 672218 0, £1.25) with its strong female central character, short compelling reads like *The Demon Bike Rider* (Fontana Lions, 0 00 671320 3, £1.00), realistic teenage fiction — *It's My Life* (Fontana Lions, 0 00 671783 7, £1.25), and of course the *Grange Hill* stories. His latest book is *Genie on the Loose* (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11177 3, £5.75 and Fontana Lions, 0 00 672294 6, £1.25), a sequel to the much enjoyed *The Third Class Genie*.

He is also a critic and lecturer on children's literature and for many years was Children's Editor of the *Morning Star*. Due to be published this autumn (by Collins) is his latest book of criticism provisionally entitled *After the Golden Age* — thoughts on fiction for the young, past, present and future.



For me, writing is an interaction between author and reader, a sharing of things held close to heart and mind. To begin with, I wrote stories that would be sufficiently exciting to stir in the young reader something of my own fascination for history. I set quick-moving adventures in vivid historical settings such as the Florence of Leonardo, in *Sign of the Swallow*, or among the Minoan splendours of Knossos in *The Bull Leapers*. The aim was to thrill and at the same time sow a seed-trail in the reader's imagination, ready to germinate when he or she looked into the past with a more searching eye.

That old triple alliance of objectives — to entertain, to inform and (possibly) to educate — forms a reasonable basis for communication over distance and between strangers. For the novel, however, it leaves out the crucial role of being *in* there; of being *it*. In my Spanish Civil War story, *The Freedom Tree*, the central characters, Will and Griff, find themselves in the cold, rat-infested trenches of the Aragon front, caught in a blazing cross-fire. Suddenly, in the pitch darkness, they are eyeball to eyeball with a youth of their own age from the enemy side, as terrified as they are.

What happens next, and how it affects the two friends, their relationship, their attitudes to the conflict and to death is unique to them and, I hope, to the reader. For a split second, if the illusion has been well enough staged, the reader *is* the experience: the mediation of the author, words and paper are forgotten in the same way that, with a film, the reality of celluloid, screen and light gives place to a reality of direct identification.

If that amounts to authorial power, then the irony is that the author rarely if ever knows what response there has been to that power. Yet the writer is not only talking to, sharing with, the reader, but is undergoing his or her own route to discovery. To be interested in history is but a small step to the altogether more dynamic condition of recognising — and perhaps developing — a *sense of history*.

Without a sense of history it is difficult, in my view, to make sense of the present.

Whoever believes that history does not repeat itself is absolutely right if he or she sticks to the pedantry of detail. Hitler was unique; Franco was unique; the bombing of Guernica was unique, and President Pinochet of Chile is unique. Tyranny, however, is not unique; nor are poverty, racialism, sexism or exploitation. That much we can learn from history, though the root causes of such phenomena are admittedly less the task of the novelist to explain than that of philosophers, historians, sociologists and political scientists.

It has often been a source of mild surprise to me to learn that while the study of politics in school is seen by many as unsuitable fare for education in a democracy, history is bread and butter to the curriculum. How history can be expected to be taught without reference to politics is beyond me, unless the

underlying philosophy is that, because history is dead (or even bunk, as Henry Ford would have it) and indeed because it is chiefly about the assertion and dominance of hierarchies (or simply larger-than-life personalities such as Henry VIII and his dreadfully abused wives), *connections* with the way things are today need never be made. *That*, however, is bunk.

Of the many pernicious doctrines that have gathered like carrion on the rooftop of 1984, the one deserving the first dose of buckshot is TINA: the notion that There Is No Alternative may strictly relate to monetarist dogma, but the danger is that the attitude is contagious. Once we admit that 'there is nothing we can do about anything', we are done for — nothing we can do about the suffering of others, nothing we can do about arrest without trial, about torture, about death squads, about starvation. That is the sense of history *some* carry about with them: it was always like this, so carry on regardless.

These are days of pessimism, for TINA rules; yet what sustains my belief — as an individual and as a writer — that TINA need not be the measure of history or the order of the day, is a confidence in the staying-power of certain fundamental values. That staying-power lies with people who, through commitment that is as natural to them as breathing or through convictions forged by circumstance, sacrifice personal safety in the cause of human rights. The tenacity of such people in times of crisis, faced often by overwhelming odds, is the source of inspiration for *The Freedom Tree* and my latest book, *Talking in Whispers*.

In 'Whispers' 16-year-old Andres falls into the hands of the torturers. Partly through his courage, partly through fortuitous circumstance, the torturers fail to extract the information they require from him; but most importantly, they fail to destroy his spirit. One of the interrogators, the Hog, flings off all control: 'He seized Andres. He roared not as the hog, not as the hyena but as the bull. He seized Andres as if suddenly he were all prisoners, as if he represented every wrong answer, every defiant spirit, every act of simple courage, every refusal to betray a loved one, every resistance to tyranny. He beat him. He dragged him. And yet it was his own cries which were the loudest, his own wailing; his boundless despair.' That is arguably the testament of humanity's faith in the triumph of good over evil.

Yet, it might be asked — for the *young* reader? If it were a universally observed right that children were protected from the realities of the adult world, privileged to escape the hardships suffered by their parents, then it would be perfectly acceptable to have a children's literature wholly given over to the dreamland of messing about in boats on languid rivers and finding secret messages in bottles. Children, though, are and have always been among history's prime victims. The children of El Salvador, Eritrea, Brazil, Indonesia etc. etc. know that well enough.

Our own children have generally been more fortunate: all the more reason for them, I believe, to at least *know* of the plight of their peers; to sympathise, to empathise, eventually

## TWO WRITERS

“Not to write ‘politically’ would be to bury the values one cherishes.”

**James Watson on making connections between the unique and the universal.**

to *understand* the connection between the happiness of some and the misery of others; to feel a sense of *solidarity* — if that is not too emotively political a term — with others.

It is that which makes *The Freedom Tree* and *Talking in Whispers* political. They are about uniqueness but they are concerned with universals: of justice and commonality. My fear is that in the age of TINA the young westerner might assume that because the persecuted have always been persecuted they can somehow tolerate persecution enough for a general fuss not to be made of it. Such an attitude is *political*, albeit by default or ignorance, and the end of that particular road — as a knowledge of history will graphically remind us — is the concentration camp and the gas chamber.

My Rubber Truncheon Award for the most disgraceful quotation of 1983 goes to Mr Norman Tebbit who justified his decision not to ban the British export of torture equipment on the grounds that if we didn't sell the stuff, others would. In the context of *that* kind of public morality, *not* to write 'politically' would be to bury the values one cherishes. It would leave the stage clear for pragmatists. Only at the entrepreneur's convenience would two and two make four.

In conclusion, a reminder to myself: to abandon, bypass or censor values as the bedrock of writerly motivation would be a calamity; one of equal severity would be to forget that novels are *stories* about *people*, not vehicles of rhetoric populated with cardboard cut-outs representing types or beliefs. If the pages don't keep turning, the sharing is at an end. In competition with the easy flow of television narratives, the printed word remains the medium that cuts deeper and sticks longer — yet only if it is given a chance.

In *Whispers*, Andres witnesses the burning of his father's and his own books. The flames lick indiscriminately at philosophical tomes and children's books alike. Today's writer is faced with the challenge of producing books riveting enough to hold attention in face of mass media competition. His or her aspiration might also be to write books good enough for burning. ●

James Watson's *Talking in Whispers* (Gollancz, 0 575 03272 3, £5.95), set in contemporary Chile, was a winner of The Other Award in 1983. His previous novels for young readers have been *Sign of the Swallow*, *The Bull Leapers*, *Legion of the White Tiger* and *The Freedom Tree*. He has also written, and had broadcast by the BBC, four 'adult' radio plays.

A teacher in further education, he was for the past three years a member of the British Amnesty Education Project and produced one of the Project's recently published units, on *Censorship*. He has latterly taken a working holiday from fiction to co-author *A Dictionary of Communication & Media Studies* to be published this year by Edward Arnold.

*Talking in Whispers* is due to appear in Fontana paperback in 1984 and is to be published in the US by Knopf-Pantheon.

# SPEAKING PERSONALLY

“The classic English children’s book is political; mine are not.”

**Jan Needle** on representing the world as he knows it.



The classic English children’s book seems to me to be deeply political. It is written by a middle-class person, about middle-class people, for middle-class people. Its politics is hence unconscious, inevitable, and all-pervasive. And because most adults who are actively involved with the children’s book — as readers, publishers and critics — are very similar in background, culture and outlook to the people who write it, its politics are invisible.

You will note, I hope, that I referred to the ‘English’ children’s book, not the ‘British’. This, I think, makes my point. For not only do the great majority of British children’s books come from a tiny group of like-minded and like-cultured people, but they reflect an Englishness that is mind-bogglingly exclusive. Fashionable, now, to pop in the odd (often very odd!) black or Asian character — after all, one has to be seen to be ‘liberal’. But tokenism aside, the world of children’s books is still overwhelmingly the world of Ransome, de Selincourt, Brazil, Blyton, Old Auntie Thomasina Cobby and all. It is ghetto fiction in which the ghetto, peculiarly, has the power to dominate the population as a whole.

Question: Why is this ‘ghetto’ so powerful, when the mass of the readership are not ‘of’ it? Answer: Because not only does it have a virtual monopoly, but our system of education is traditionally (and probably totally unconsciously, by now) geared to the propagation of a set of values which are not ‘of’ the majority of those who receive it. Even those (many) teachers who crave sufficient alternative material, are operating an exam-oriented curriculum. And there aren’t any questions on Grange Hill on those papers!

Illustration: One of my books for younger children, *Losers Weepers*, was heavily criticised in the *Sunday Times* because the dialogue in it is rendered in a (rather generalised) Northern dialect. The reviewer thought it a pity, because it meant ‘most children would not be able to understand it’. Being originally from the South, I write about half my books in (equally generalised) Southern speech. No one’s told me off so far, surprise surprise.

By a similar process, I think, the books which tend to win ‘literary’ awards reflect a view of ‘literature’ which has nothing to do with the taste of their intended audience, but a great deal to do with the Victorian (and therefore, for us new-Elizabethans, a political) desire to ‘improve’ the young. If the dichotomy were not so sad, it would be funny: on the one hand concerned adults are trying to encourage children to read, and on the other they are actively disapproving of, if not actively suppressing, the very books which are enjoyed and chosen by kids. It’s a good job there is not an equally powerful coterie of mathematicians who disapprove of computers with some equally strange (but, to them, plausible) rationale.

The above is not, incidentally, sour grapes. I’ve come as close as a toucher to winning two of the big awards, as well as an Other.

But the point is this: the criteria by which these things are judged fit perfectly with the ground rules I laid out. The awards circus is a sub-section of the sub-section of society that some people look upon, and refer to, as the children’s book mafia. Working honestly, most of them, for what *they* perceive as the common good.

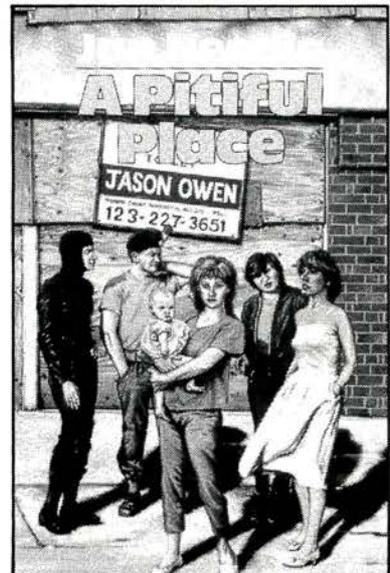
Having made this rather amazing claim that the classic (or even the average) English children’s book is political, let me raise the eyebrows of those who know and love (to categorise) my work even further by claiming that mine are *not*. I’m not talking about all my books (some are merely jolly, or adventures, or just plain daft), but just the ones that are often dubbed ‘social realistic’, like *Albeson and the Germans*, *My Mate Shofiq*, *A Sense of Shame*, *Piggy in the Middle* and the new one, *A Pitiful Place*. True, they deal with subjects like racism, police brutality, and the Falklands conflict, which might reasonably be seen to be the stuff of politics. But they offer no ‘line’, they have no discernible tendency, they are in absolutely no way didactic. Most of all (as at least one of my publishers would sadly say) they do not bestow upon the child reader an optimism that I, as an adult, believe to be false. It is this false optimism that I hold to be the fundamental political act in the sort of book I have been talking about.

But if the false optimism of the ‘classic English children’s book’ is political, even if unconscious, how can I claim to be non-political by *knowingly* refusing to perpetuate the same lie — while deliberately choosing subjects which may be called the stuff of politics to boot? Simply like this: I know where I come from, and I know where I am. Within the (desperate) limitations of fiction-writing, I write about people and events which I know. There is no narrow or identifiable political tendency in my books because I do not have one. And I don’t write my kind of books as an antidote, I write because they represent the world as I believe in it.

I suspect many people may think I’m being disingenuous — or even mendacious; but I

don’t think I am. Let me give you a final example. Kenneth Grahame wrote *The Wind in the Willows* (which is one of my favourite books; I love it). Grahame was not being political, but he mirrored his own world unconsciously: a world in which the very rich enjoyed themselves in absurdly selfish ways and the very poor were humiliated or suffered — and in any case misbehaved. I wrote *Wild Wood*, in which the antics of Toad and his friends are seen through the eyes of the stoats, the ferrets and the weasels — the starving rural poor. It is a book about politics, unlike Grahame’s, but it is still not a political book, God forbid. And even the *Daily Telegraph* ‘loved every word’!

We don’t need more politics in children’s literature, we need less. If there were more people like me writing more books like some of mine, they would cease to be ‘controversial’. Blow the trumpets: and let the ghetto walls come tumbling down. ●



**Jan Needle** has written sixteen books, most of them for children, and many of them extremely controversial. But he vigorously rejects the idea of being a ‘political’ writer. This year has already seen *Great Days at Grange Hill* and *Tucker’s Luck* (novels for Fontana Lions based on the TV series) hit the bookstalls. This month they are joined by a joke-book, *We Are the Champions*, (Piccolo, 0 330 21843 7, 95p) and a volume of stories *A Pitiful Place* (Deutsch, 0 233 97560 8, £4.95) very much in the tradition of *A Sense of Shame* and *Piggy in the Middle*. Jan says the stories had a very stormy passage *before* publication; our advice is not to miss them if you care to offer young adults an unblinking and uncompromising view of some aspects of our current society, written with irony, compassion and anger.

# REVIEWS

Reviews of paperback fiction are grouped for convenience under teaching range. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendation for use can be found within the reviews.

## Nursery/Infants



**I Can Touch**  
0 00 662055 8

**I Can Smell and Taste**  
0 00 662056 6  
Peter Curry, Picture Lions, £1.25 each

A further pair of Curry's books for the under fives which aim to stimulate an interest in the senses. The simple pictures — large bold blocks of colour outlined in black — are supported and extended by a first person narrative in carefully chosen words that aptly convey the sensual nature of the subjects.

more sympathetic when he meets a bald hedgehog. His good deed in finding and making a wig for the unfortunate hedgehog is repaid in the shape of a bicycle which enables him to become a hero with his fellow frogs. Such is the deft touch of the artist that humour and pathos leap from every page of this delightful book which deserves a place in every primary classroom.

JB

**The Bear's Toothache**  
416 45240 X

**Where Can an Elephant Hide?**  
416 45250 7  
David McPhail, Magnet £1.35 each

In an easy-to-read story, the dream and fantasy world of a



small boy seemingly becomes reality when he finds a bear with toothache outside his bedroom window. His effort to effect a cure reduce the kitchen and bedroom to a shambles but the troublesome tooth is finally extracted and hidden safely under the pillow.

There are shades of Sendak in the shadowy pictures whose colours heighten the mood and impact of the nocturnal adventure.

JB

In *Where Can an Elephant*

## Reviewers in this issue



**Jill Bennett** is in charge of a Reading Centre in Middlesex. She is the compiler of **Learning to Read with Picture Books** and of several anthologies of poetry for infants. Literary Editor of **Child Education** and on the Board of the SBA.



**Cathy Lister** teaches in a middle school in Staffordshire, with responsibility for English and Language across the Curriculum.



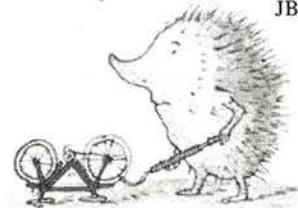
**Colin Mills** is in the Division of Teaching Studies at Worcester College where he helps run a Diploma in Children's Literature. He's taught in a comprehensive school, a primary school and worked in radio.



**Bill Boyle** teaches in Middle School in Wirral. He was founding Deputy Editor of **Junior Education**.



**David Bennett** (no relation to Jill) is a former librarian and currently Head of English in a Nottinghamshire secondary school.



JB

**Gilbert and the Bicycle**  
Jack Harvey, Hippo, 0 590 70300 5, £1.25

Gilbert's lack of jumping prowess makes him all the

**Hide?** Morris's size is a problem whenever he tries to play his favourite game, hide and seek; there's just nowhere he cannot be seen. Various animals offer advice but whilst appropriate for the adviser none is effective for an elephant, till his sub-aquatic resting place and an untimely sneeze save him from the hunters. And that calls for a celebration — hide and seek of course!

An enjoyable diversion but not a story with a lasting impact.

JB

**Topsy Turvy Tales**  
Leila Berg, Magnet, 0 416 45970 6, £1.25

A re-issue of a collection of tales for reading aloud to the very young, originally entitled **Folk Tales for Reading and Telling** this book has long been a reliable source for story time in the infant classroom and since the demise of the Piccolo edition a paperback has not been available; so this 'Magnet' is doubly attractive.

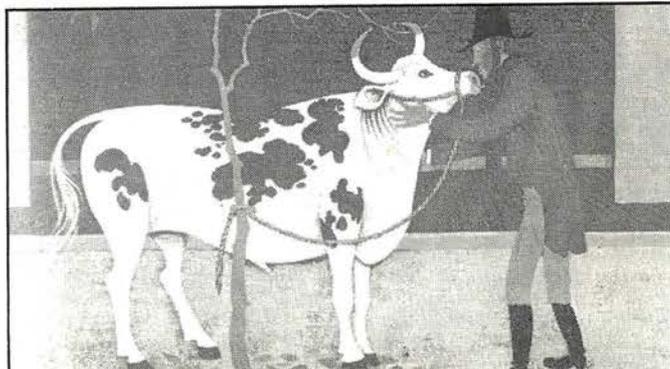
JB

## Infant/Junior

**Ox-Cart Man**  
Donald Hall, pictures by Barbara Cooney, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.441 9, £1.75

Set in 19th century rural New England, this award winning picture book from *The States* gives a fascinating glimpse of a farmer's year in a bygone age and shows how a whole family is involved in the business of survival. A book to extend children's horizons in both place and time. All ages.

JB



**Angry Arthur**  
Hiawyn Oram, pictures by Satoshi Kitamura, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.426 5, £1.25

Deprived of his favourite T.V. programme, Arthur's anger knows no bounds. His fury envelops first the house, then the neighbourhood and then the universe and before finally blowing itself out, he seems to have destroyed everything except the safe haven of his own bed.

Yes, it does owe something to Sendak but this book has an originality of its own and its potential for helping children to come to terms with their emotions is immense.

JB

### Frog and Toad All Year

0 14 03 1566 7

### Days with Frog and Toad

0 14 03 1567 5

Arnold Lobel, Young Puffin (I Can Read), £1.50 each

Lobel's artistry and the winning format of these books (spacious text, sensitive attention to line and page breaks) combine to give five to eights a splendidly satisfying read.

Each of these has five self-contained stories, able to be read in a manageable session. The patterns and shapes of Lobel's stories extend his readers' competences and provide bridges from picture books to extended texts. In 'All Year', the seasons change throughout the stories. Read *Shivers* from 'Days With...' and encourage the young to talk about story-telling and listening.

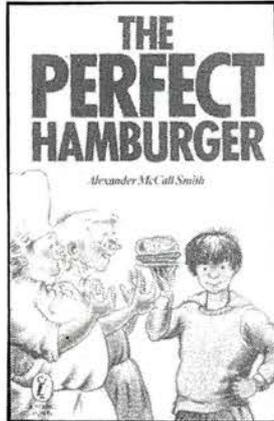
The pictures are pastel, pastoral — without ever being twee. Excellent collections.

CM

### The Perfect Hamburger

Alexander McCall Smith, Puffin, 0 14 03.1670 1, 95p

An immediately engaging story for those just going solo and with the confidence to tackle a



more sustained text than most picture books offer. Originally one of the 'Antelope' series this tells of a boy's frantic search for that elusive ingredient needed to make the hamburger that can save Mr Borthwick's business.

JB

### Tottie: The Story of a Dolls' House

Rumer Godden, ill.

Joanna Jamieson, Young Puffin, 0 14 03 1675 2, £1.00

Read this elegantly-presented book before the children, if you've time, and see how a writer's craft can unfold a tale that — if less skilfully handled — may seem precious, outdated. The first chapters are miniature masterpieces and Miss Godden's language ('Come fog, come fine, no one could be unkind to Apple') gives children the sense of a gentle, bygone age.

The tale of Tottie and the Plantaganet family's move from shoe box to palatial Dolls'

House has proved popular in its recent T.V. version and this will be welcome to those who enjoyed that. Well worth serialising for six to nines. The harsher edges aren't smoothed over which is the sign of a fine writer. The pictures, poised and angular, are just right.

CM

### The Kitchen Warriors

Joan Aiken, ill. Jo Worth, BBC/Knight, 0 340 33517 3, £1.25

I know of very few other writers who can create complex, fantastic worlds which are accessible and coherent to older infants and young juniors (I'm still thrilled and surprised when I read *Kingdom Under The Sea* to children). Here, easy surface text and domestic settings fold up magic, imagery and a truly poetic tale.

A returning prince has to re-establish himself in his father's kingdom. My young listeners (6 to 8's) understood both the immediacy and the magical elements of kitchen cupboards and deep freezers: how well Miss Aiken links the fabulous to the ordinary.

A stunning tale. The illustrations deserve sharing and showing too.

CM

### Precisely Pig

Michael Berthoud, ill. John Lawrence, Magnet, 0 416 46160 3, £1.25

The hero is one of those quirky individuals who'll fit in well to the gallery of animals five to nines know in their reading. He's the slightly eccentric, upper-crust 'gent'

who does not quite fit in to conventional expectations of a farm pig.

Lively bunch of characters, including Barnabus the Bull, Mistress Tabbycoat and Gregorious Goat. The writer has wit, style and an ability to involve readers and listeners unobtrusively, so that they take the ironies of the tale.

A good find: splendid cover and pictures.

CM

### Charlie, Emma & Alberic

Margaret Greaves, Magnet, 0 416 46990 6, £1.10

When Charlie and Emma find a 'tiny lizard' climbing out of a hole in the road, little do they know that they are about to make a dragon their pet, with whom they will have all kinds of adventures. The episodic nature of this book for newly independent readers offers them suitable stopping points as well as an amusing but undemanding tale.

JB

### A Bad Case of Animal Nonsense

Jonathan Allen, Magnet, 0 416 45360 0, £1.00

This assortment of alphabetic puns, jokes and rhymes is one of those apparently inconsequential books which teachers tend to disregard but which children delight in at that stage when they have just become independent readers. And it could be a boon for teachers searching for material for older readers who don't find reading easy let alone enjoyable.

JB

## Junior/Middle



'Off with her head.' The Prince despatches an Ugly Sister, Dahl style, in *Cinderella* from

### Revolting Rhymes

Roald Dahl, ill. Quentin Blake, Picture Puffins, 0 14 050 423 0, £1.50

Dahl's linguistic wizardry is here exploited to the full in these richly ironic and irreverent pastiches of six well-known fairy stories. Dahl is letting his listeners (they need

to be read aloud) in on the tensions and ambiguities (the 'it could have been *this* way' implicit in all narrative). Middle juniors and upwards who know the originals and can see the fun in exploiting form will want these for their own. As always, Dahl knows how to get readers on his side ('I say again, how would you feel?') and Blake's pictures match the mayhem. Try it in the staffroom.

CM

### Jonny Briggs and the Jubilee Concert

Joan Eadington, ill. William Marshall, BBC/Knight, 0 340 34837 2, £1.25

Favourite 'Jackanory' character returns, this time school being the setting of a tale involving a concert. The tensions, excitement and the sense of 'anything could happen' that surrounds such events will be familiar. There's a hint of the 'formula' in the put-upon teachers — but the predictability

does help reluctant eight to eevens in and along in my experience.

I lead them on later to Gene Kemp, for Ms Eadington, at her best, has the same ear for dialogue and, when the action slows down, she can catch the tunes of junior school life.

CM

### The Brownies in Hospital

Pamela Sykes, Beaver, 0 09 933230 2, 95p

### Cubs with a Difference

Stephen Andrews, Beaver, 0 09 933220 5, 95p

Both these writers overcome the most difficult parts of plotting (bringing the characters together and giving them a shared lore and language) by setting the stories in contexts where roles are well-defined and grown-ups' expectations are clear.

In *The Brownies* story, Tracy learns to make the best of things (even though she's broken her leg and has to miss the Pack holiday). Fortitude wins through. In *Cubs...* Snowy, who's a perfect Cub and gets it all right first time, is contrasted with Nobby who's the Pack clown.

Both have a sense of fun, but there's a didactic tone — and they're rather 'adults' eye views' of children. But I know one or two readers of nine or ten who'll enjoy them on the way to more stirring things.

CM

### McGurk and the Lost Atoll

Osmar White, ill. Jeff Hook, Puffin, 0 14 03 16116, 95p

Sophisticated juniors who enjoyed the same writer's *Super Roo of Mungalongaloo* need to find this.

Intrepid explorer Dr. A. A. A. McGurk and Camel Cathie

Khan have hair-raising adventures on Pacific crossing. Remember, if you find the action breathless, that your youngsters gained their earliest understandings of narrative as much from *Dr. Who* as from the books they've read in schools.

The writer respects his readers and expects them to be in tune with his jokey, journalistic style: are yours?

CM

### The Voice from Nowhere

Bill Butler, Knight Books, 0 340 35153 5, £1.25

Inoffensive, school kids as detectives, mildly interesting, quite well written addition to the hundreds of similar books already on the 'kid lit' market. Perhaps the real message — if there is one — from stories such as these is contained in a quote from one of the characters. 'How many more times have I got to tell you to stop this rubbish. I don't mind you playing detective games if you must. If the crook you're after is an adult, the chances are that he's vicious and dangerous.' Well it was never like that when the Famous Five were on the trail of the 'baddies', mind you Ronald Reagan was playing cowboys then.

More (if needed!) of the Stanwick School Sleuths in *The Nightmare Clowns* (0 340 35152 7, £1.25).

BB

### The Secret World of Polly Flint

Helen Creswell, Puffin, 0 14 03 1542 X, £1.25

Where can a small child find comfort when she is forced to live with an over-efficient, unimaginative aunt, not knowing when her injured father and anxious mother will return? Polly has a leaning towards seeing things, an affinity for dreams and fantasy, and discovers a strange family and even stranger world to console her.

In a park near Aunt Em's there is a lake and a wood, a world that Polly can easily

turn into a magic land in her mind. This time imagination becomes 'reality'. She becomes involved with the time gypsies, and her own misery is forgotten as she endeavours to help them back to their own time.

This is a superb story, highly praised by all the children who have tried it. Helen Creswell has created a world where the reader can worry, fuss and plot with Polly. It is not an intangible, fairy world, for Polly's problems are real, substantial, partly familiar: a cross and ragged granny, a baby with nowhere to sleep, a homeless dog and a mysterious man from whom all children must keep well away. When the time gypsies are safely home Polly's father comes home too. Polly is secure again, 'secure in her dreams'. A deeply involving, satisfying book. Offer it to all top primary and middle school children. Read aloud too. A TV version is promised soon.

CL

### The Little Vampire Moves In

Angela Sommer-Bodenburg, Hippo, 0 590 70298 X, £1.00

Not the first book I have read about miniature and harmless vampires in recent times. Is there some attempt to detract from video-nasties by humanising the vampire? Vampires are in trouble when they consort with humans. Human children have much to worry about when they attempt to conceal child vampires in the basement. Very predictable, cosy, satisfying, a lengthy but easy read. Testers of ten and eleven were enthusiastic but it is unlikely that they will find it a memorable book. The humorous cover with hints of gore should make it easily saleable.

CL

### Save Our School

Gillian Cross, Magnet, 0 416 30110 X, £1.00

'I couldn't get into this book. It really is fictional', words of a twelve year old tester. 'This book starts too quickly and isn't very adventurous' — eleven year old.

The plot is a very modern one. Hard times mean that Bennett

school is to be combined with King's Road and the old school knocked down. The children set out to save Bennett's and succeed in enlisting the help of the Press. There are lots of antics but told in a rather flat childish dialogue which prevents real involvement. The title and cover will sell copies but many readers will be disappointed.

CL

### Arthur and the Purple Panic

Alan Coren, Puffin, 0 14 03 1362 1, £1.00

To lie in your bath and have a purple face, tongue sticking out, peering at you through the lace curtains is not amusing. If you are Queen Victoria and the face is that of Nelson on his column at the other end of the Mall then you are certainly not amused. The reader however is. Alan Coren continues his stories of Arthur, the schoolboy who solves all Sherlock Holmes' most difficult cases. Now he pursues and captures the mysterious vandal who is painting all England's greatest monuments purple and leaving behind contemptuous messages.

The Arthur books are always favourites. Children recognise that they do not have to be very accomplished readers to complete a whole book so the young and less able find them very acceptable. At the same time older children with a developed sense of humour recognise Alan Coren's skill as he parodies any cliché ever spoken or written. Young readers thus become older connoisseurs. There should be a ready market in the bookshop. Add one to the library collection as well.

CL

### Star Stormers 5: Volcano

Nicholas Fisk, Knight Books, 0 340 32093 1, £1.25

The Star Stormers and I have met before, and despite the hammer blows of the violent energy of the action, ceaseless in some chapters, I emerged to fight another day. This fifth (and final, oh no!) adventure is constructed from much the

same recipe as the earlier epics. 'Mak the strong one, Tsu the cool one, Vawn the instinctive one, Ispex the solemnly clever one.' Yes, they're still all here, folks, goodness knows how after encountering strange worlds, a derelict spaceship, a jungle planet, plus their implacable enemy the Emperor of Tyrannopolis (where?). Epsilon Cool for ever, I say, so there. Marvellous rubbish which doesn't pretend to be anything else.

BB



### The Skiver's Guide

Diana Wynne Jones, Knight Books, 0 340 33985 3, £1.25

Lovely idea. As one of the world's great skivers I resent my secrets being revealed to the world, but secretly admire someone having the idea of making money out of publishing a book about the subject. In fact, it's rather gratifying to find among the other great skivers of history, Nero, Alfred the Great, Robert the Bruce and Albert Einstein, to whom I'm sure you could add a few famous names yourself. Sections which will repay close study are 'Golden Rules of Skiving' and 'How to tell when Work is coming', and the three pages of 'Common Excuses' should be compulsory rote learning for all would-be skivers. For the outlay of £1.25 you gain the key to a lifetime of skiving, it must be the bargain of the year.

BB

## Middle/Secondary

### Fast from the Gate

Michael Hardcastle, Magnet, 0 416 47090 4, £1.00

Out of the wide range of popular pursuits for young people, sport is probably the least well represented in young fiction, except by Mr. Hardcastle, who picks up some of the least written-about activities and weaves them into fast-moving, popularist stories.

Motorbikes and Motocross



come in for treatment here as Lee Parnaby battles it out along with the rest of them. In this sequel to *Roar to Victory* Lee loses his own bike when chasing a stray donkey, only to retrieve it from local baddies with the help of Cousin Joanne who adds the female interest. It's a familiar mix of fast moving detail about the sport, stereotyped baddies, desperate situations that always have a desperate remedy and an honourable, sporting hero. One would expect boys to enjoy it

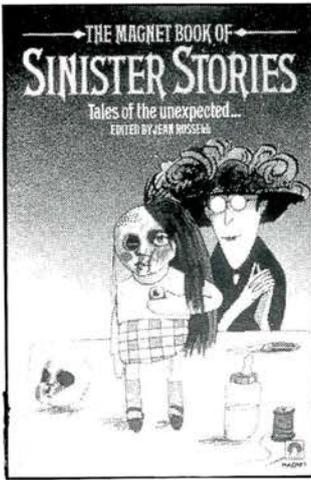
most; a kind of antidote in fiction to all those motorcycle magazines and non-fiction books that they pore over so devotedly?

DB

### Sinister Stories

ed. Jean Russell, Magnet, 0 416 46120 4, £1.25

It is uncommon to come across such a consistently good collection of short stories, but



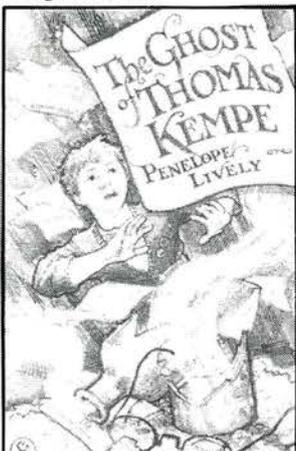
then with contributors like Jan Mark, Marjorie Darke and Patricia Miles one should expect good reading.

As an introduction to the authors these tales would serve well — the zany, magic and upside-downness of Aiken — "What shall we do about the Unicorn? Cousin Elspeth doesn't approve of keeping pets."; the gently humorous dialogue of Mark — "... some of those carols are six hundred years old." "So are the carol singers," said Mum.; are but two examples in this fittingly excellent collection by the late Jean Russell, which deserves a place in most secondary classrooms as an antidote to the third-rate gothic horror tales that abound elsewhere. DB

### The Ghost of Thomas Kempe

Penelope Lively, Puffin, 0 1403 1496 2, £1.25

James Harrison and the cantankerous old sorcerer Thomas Kempe first appeared in 1973 and won the Carnegie Medal for Penelope Lively. I have used it extensively with pupils and always found it popular and useful, I think due to its lively theme of ghosts, sorcerers and exorcism, but also because it is a very perceptive study of the frustration of coping alone with problems which no-one else, especially adults, seem to recognise or rate.



A bottle is broken as builders prepare the attic bedroom of

an old cottage for the new occupants — the Harrisons. This uncorks Kempe; a medieval, meddling sorcerer, who is determined to exert his past influence on the present with frustrating effects for all concerned, especially his young reluctant apprentice James. A very significant tale, appearing for the first time in Puffin as Penelope Lively 'transfers' from Piccolo. DB

### Apollo the Golden God

Doris Gates, Puffin, 0 14 03 1647 7, £1.50

All the tales of Apollo put together in some sort of chronological order. This book was emphatically rejected by a variety of testers varying in age and ability across the middle school. The only praise was for the rather unusual black and white wash illustrations by Constantinos Coconis. These drawings are a strange cross between the symbolic art of ancient Greece and modern poster art. There are hints of the eerie and unpleasant about them which seemed to intrigue the children.

The stories were originally told by Doris Gates to children at story-telling sessions in a Californian library. The telling rather than reading style remains; the tone implies group involvement, and testers found it difficult to become involved.

One of a series about Greek myths; a slim, tempting volume which may serve better as a handbook for teachers and other tellers of tales rather than as an accessible text for young readers. CL

### The Rectory Mice

George Macbeth, Sparrow, 0 09 032870 4, £1.25

'But why do they want to kill each other? Isn't that very wasteful?' Thus said Tamburlaine Mouse to his father as they observed the preparations for war at the rectory where British soldiers are billeted in 1914. Parallel to the human story, George MacBeth tells of a family of mice fighting the battle for survival in the attic. Tamburlaine finds violence exciting and those who die heroic. He is to die himself when the mice are smoked out of the attic. **The Rectory Mice** is a metaphoric tale taking an ironic look at human behaviour through the eyes and lives of the mice. Young readers may be misled into thinking it is an easy read. It is however linguistically quite a challenge and accessible really to the eleven plus group. With sensitive discussion it should read aloud well to a top primary class. CL

### The Sylvia Game

Vivien Alcock, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672138 9, £1.25

There are some splendid

passages in **The Sylvia Game**. For example, the food at the Fairview Hotel 'which had probably finished off the weaker visitors. Meat was covered with a thick brown sauce, and fish with a thick white sauce, and chicken by a combination of the two'.

Unfortunately these brief highlights cannot carry the story and are peripheral to the action, failing to disguise the inherent lack of quality or ingenuity in the writing. Besides which Emily is so boring that no self-respecting child will tolerate her past the first twenty pages. Who is Sylvia? Who cares? BB

### Robin of Sherwood

Richard Carpenter, Puffin, 0 14 03.1690 6, £1.25

Producing a new version of the Robin Hood legend to succeed the countless earlier stories, must have been a thankless task, but Richard Carpenter manages to give some new slants to this most traditional of English adventures. A welcome prologue ties in the Loxley antecedents to set the scene for Robin's continual feud with the Norman overlords, and the evocation of the medieval obsession with the supernatural and its attendant superstitions firmly places the tale in its historical context. Carpenter's version is spare and quick in its movement of plot and action, as befits its origin as a television script, but well fleshed by the author's gift for description. There are continually new generations of youngsters meeting the story for the first time and this provides both the excitement and the factual accuracy to recommend it. BB

### The Huntsman

Douglas Hill, Piccolo, 0 330 26956 9, £1.25

From the author of the **Last Legionary Quartet** comes this first volume of a new series which looks to have all the excitement and power of the best of his earlier work. Finn Ferral is The Huntsman set in a distant future on earth. He was found as a youngster living in the wild, brought up by adoptive parents, who are themselves kidnapped by alien Slavers. In this first book, Finn sets off in search of his 'parents', a journey that is to prove incredibly dangerous and hazardous as he is opposed by the horrendous beastmen, who obstruct his progress to the lair of the Slavers. By the end of this first book, the pursuit has succeeded in freeing Finn's adopted father leaving the appetite neatly whetted for a further episode in pursuit of the mother. BB

### A Stranger Came Ashore

Mollie Hunter, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672260 1, £1.25

Mollie Hunter has woven a

story of mystery and legend. Just as the Great Selkie entices away beautiful girls so this tale entices the reader on, as anxious as the characters in the story to solve the mystery of the stranger who comes to them from the sea. Robbie's grandfather is in touch with the magic of the islands' legends. When he dies it is up to Robbie to convince his family that the dashing stranger will ensnare his sister; that the happiness he has brought is to be short-lived.

I often find it difficult to persuade children to try Mollie Hunter. The themes she writes about can appear too much of a challenge but those who are persuaded often become devoted readers. A book you may need to 'sell', but well worth it. CL

### The Homeward Bounders

Diana Wynne Jones, Magnet, 0 416 22940 9, £1.50

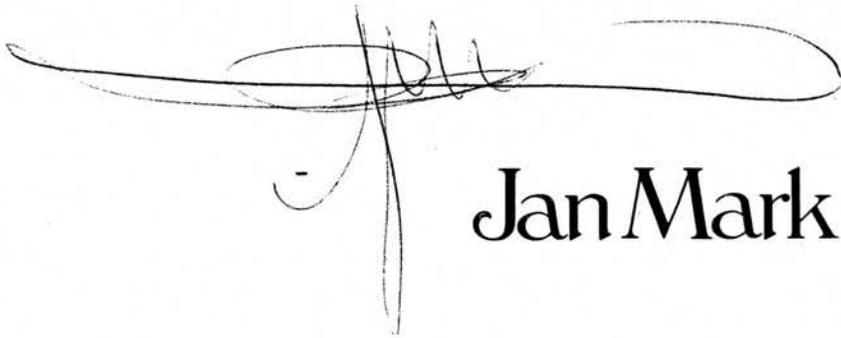
Diana Wynne Jones writes some of the most imaginative and intriguing fantasy available, and at the same time it can be some of the most complex. This stimulating offering is no exception. It mingles the Promethean legend with war gaming, ley lines and I know not what else. Jamie, a kind of Heracles figure is a pawn in the games played by 'Them' on their boards in the glass places, but then so is everyone else a pawn. What makes the hero and his future companions exceptional is that they are randoms, who may fairly freely tread the bounds between the games (or universes) and, if they do not lose hope, may eventually get back home. Jamie manages to destroy this kind of servitude by the very fact that he does lose hope and upset 'their' plans. It's uncompromising, it's demanding and never less than challenging — but what a dreary cover! DB

### Kept in the Dark

Nina Bawden, Puffin, 0 14 03.1550 0, £1.25

Three children whose parents are actors, one 'resting' and the other on the verge of a nervous breakdown, are sent to live in a rambling, rapidly decaying house owned by their unfamiliar grandparents. Sinister family skeletons lurk all around influencing most strongly the relationships that develop between grandparents, grandchildren and a hitherto unknown cousin, David, whose personality seems moulded by loneliness, the desire to belong and the need to dominate. Somehow a good idea seems to fail here and the story falters and fades to a rushed and compromised ending. The atmosphere of menace and 'all is not as it should be' is splendidly realised at the onset and takes the reader into the book at a lively pace, but then one is left feeling that it was all something about nothing anyway — a great pity. Ask the kids what they think. DB

# Authorgraph No.25



## Jan Mark

Jan Mark's first novel **Thunder and Lightnings** was published in 1976, winning both the Penguin/Guardian competition and the Carnegie Medal. In the intervening eight years her stature amongst English writers for children has grown with each new publication. Her latest novel **Handles** finds her in most 'English' vein and returning to the Norfolk village setting of her first book. A measure of her stature is her nomination this year as the British entry for the international Hans Andersen award. For the past eighteen months she has been attached to Oxford Polytechnic's Education Department, on an Arts Council Writer's Fellowship.

Few writers are as coherent as Jan Mark when talking about their intentions as a writer or more trenchant in their views about children as writers.

She makes clear distinctions about her work as a short story writer — a form she clearly enjoys returning to (**Nothing to Be Afraid of, Hairs in the Palm of the Hand, Feet**); what she calls her 'observational' novels (**Thunder and Lightnings, Under the Autumn Garden, Handles**); and the 'heavies', her 'speculative' novels (**The Ennead, Divide and Rule, Aquarius**).

These distinctions depend for her much more upon the different demands of the short story and the novel rather than on the audience she's writing for — children or adults:

'Novels are linear but short stories aren't. The best analogy is the movie. A film is made up of thousands of still frames and if you isolate one frame, as with a paragraph in a novel, you learn very little. In a short story you're stopping the movie at one frame, isolating a particular moment, the seminal moment at which development begins to happen. It may be the moment when someone is jolted out of inertia and it's your job as a writer to justify the moment. In **A Little Misunderstanding (Feet)**, I deliberately chose that title because the boy entirely misconceived the situation and it's only

at the very end that he realises what he's let himself in for. So in a short story, you've got to know the moment towards which you're working . . . the end is in the beginning.'

Moving on to discuss her first two novels and the latest **Handles**, Jan used a different analogy — that of the artist 'working from life'. **Handles** is a 'look at a relationship', a developing relationship — that between the eleven year old, bike-mad Erica and 'Elsie' Wainwright, the ex-teacher who runs a failing motor-cycle repair business:

'It's very episodic and, like **Thunder and Lightnings**, it's got no plot. It's a love-story — Erica is in love with 'Elsie'. It's the beginning of a sexual attraction which she doesn't understand.

I doubt if many children would realise that or many adults — they're so conditioned to thinking that eleven year olds couldn't feel like that. Taken one way it's a very depressing book — it's certainly not light. But I'm not trying to make any points. I'm observing day-to-day situations. An adult would speculate — that Erica's probably not going to realise her dream and become a mechanic or that, 'Elsie's' business will fail. I don't think a child would pick up the implications . . .'

The novels in which she 'works from life' are all about children and the narrative is shaped by the child's perception of the world. They also impose their own demands on the writer:

'You owe it to the audience to provide a story. Children are not experienced in the way that adults are. They haven't got the equipment so you have to give them something more concrete to work on. There has to be something there other than hints, clues, allusions which you can expect a more experienced reader to pick up (as in **Aquarius**). I like writing about children. I don't want always to be writing about children . . .'

So what about the novels, the three 'heavies', which are not 'about children'? — 'In them, I'm setting up situations and inviting the reader to explore the situation along with the writer. They're for a sophisticated reader and they're deliberately written to discourage an unsophisticated reader.



Photo courtesy of the Observer.

Critics picked up that the opening of *Aquarius* was "convoluted". It's meant to be. I'm not working from life, I'm inventing an environment. So they're more abstract. Through the situations I'm speculating about manipulation — emotional, religious, political. Isaac, Harris and Viner are all different developments of the same basic pattern — the survivor. Harris (*Divide and Rule*), who is a liberal, SDP, *Guardian* reader in an extreme and bigoted society, is the least successful and probably the most sympathetic of the three.

*Aquarius* is the only time I've played a consciously, literary trick. Readers excuse Viner's behaviour because they think he's the hero. In fact, he's totally self-interested, too intelligent to be the hero. He's a manipulator and completely ruthless. But we accept certain kinds of behaviour because we're conditioned to accept them.'

It was clearly *Aquarius* which she felt least happy about appearing under a 'children's' imprint:

'They are very literary and I don't like being explicit. I like to make the reader work hard . . .'

There was a strong sense, too, in her remarks of a desire to go on to do new things:

'They (the "heavies") could get very much more self-indulgent. I didn't think so at the time but I think I'm coming dangerously close to covering the same ground by doing three books so similar in treatment.'

The experience of working at Oxford Polytechnic has contributed a great deal to that sense of new directions:

'The input is going to take years to work through and it's had a tremendous effect on what I want to write. I'd had five years of almost uninterrupted writing in an empty room, in an empty house, eight hours a day. If you're writing as a profession, you atrophy. The world dwindles to you and a typewriter — there's no input. Suddenly I was with students, colleagues — involved in an institution and its arguments and politics. It's been an unrivalled opportunity to study people . . . so there's something else to process now.'

Those at Oxford who may feel uneasy at that remark will be reassured to hear that, whatever else she may be planning to do, it isn't going to be a 'History Man' on Polytechnic life! Whatever she may have gained from the experience of working with student teachers, there can be little doubt about what they will have gained from her. She has encouraged them to write though she hasn't set up 'creative writing workshops' — 'that's anathema'. Rather she's asked her students to write that they might better understand the demands teachers so thoughtlessly impose when they ask children to write fiction. It was here that the connection became clear between her own intentions as a writer and her work with children and students.

Her students, she remarked: 'have no confidence in their personal lives. Yet each one of them is uniquely qualified to write about themselves . . . the first



duty of a teacher is to convince the pupils of the immense value of what they know.'

This emphasis on the personal knowledge of the writer emerged again when Jan talked about how she researched her books. None of her readers can have failed to notice the expertise she shows — the knowledge of bikes, for example, which she displays through Erica in *Handles*. Authenticity and integrity are closely related in her writing.

'The research for *Handles* was more a matter of checking with living people . . . I do myself like to know how things work. It is essential you know and you've got to let it show. It weakens the reader's confidence in the writer if you generalise and gloss over. You need to demand to be believed. Your knowledge gives you an authority which transmits itself to the reader.'

In talking about the novel she's working on at the moment, Jan gave an interesting insight into how the elements she'd described work out in practice. The raw materials are there in personal experience and her scrupulous observation of the world around her and these elements are transformed by her interest in 'looking at a relationship' at the point when it's beginning to develop.

'It's based partly on a trip I made with my brother who's a long distance lorry driver . . . then I went to Rochdale to visit a school and I had to travel through Oldham from Manchester and I saw the cotton-mills. They've got names on, proper names, about 190 of them all with names. I linked this with the idea of the long distance lorry driver . . . a man who's still getting to

know his stepdaughter. They're still at the stage of being fearfully polite to each other and he coaxes her to come with him up North in the lorry to see one of the mills that's got her name on it. That's the basis of the story . . .'

At some point in the future we can also expect a picture book illustrated by Anthony Maitland. The starting point this time is not personal experience but an incident from Gorky's *My Childhood* — a story his grandmother tells of thousands of little furry, kitten-like devils being released one time when the oven door blew open. It's a story that Jan obviously relishes:

'It's quite unlike anything I've done . . . I wasn't trying to make a new departure for picture books based on Russian classics. It's purely personal pleasure and a sort of perverted enjoyment of knowing it comes from such an unlikely source. I know four year olds won't give a damn where it came from but it amuses me to think I've got a picture book out of Gorky. And it's also the only animal story I've ever written. All the others have been about people. It's really about keeping a pet, featuring a responsible adult who says "Put that back where you found it!" In this case, it's a devil that's supposed to be going back into the oven . . .'

Whatever we may expect from Jan Mark in the future we can be sure that she will go on resisting 'covering the same ground' to the despair, no doubt, of those same critics who wanted her to go on rewriting *Thunder and Lightnings*. It's her own 'personal pleasure' she'll be pursuing in her writing. Otherwise, as far as she's concerned 'the excitement would have gone out.'

### The Books

(Titles published in hardback by Kestrel and in paperback by Puffin unless otherwise stated.)

**Aquarius**  
0 7226 5793 5, £5.95 hb

**The Dead Letter Box**  
Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10804 7,  
£2.75 hb; (0 14 03.1619 3, pb)

**Divide and Rule**  
0 7226 5620 3, £5.50 hb

**The Ennead**  
0 7226 5477 4, £5.50 hb;  
0 14 03.1354 0, £1.50 pb

**Feet and Other Stories**  
0 7226 5839 7, £4.95 hb

**Hairs in the Palm of the Hand**  
0 7226 5728 5, £4.95 hb;  
0 14 03.1441 5, 95p pb

**Handles**  
0 7226 5857 5, £5.50 hb

**Long Distance Poet**  
CUP, 0 521 25500 7, £2.50 hb;  
0 521 27510 5, £1.25 pb

**Nothing to Be Afraid of**  
0 7226 5677 7, £4.95 hb;  
0 14 03.1392 3, £1.10 pb

**Thunder and Lightnings**  
Heinemann Educational (New Windmill series), 0 435 12238 X, £1.70;  
0 7226 5195 3, £6.95 hb;  
0 14 03.1063 0, £1.10 pb

**Under the Autumn Garden**  
0 7226 5347 6, £4.95 hb;  
0 14 03.1248 X, 90p pb

# HOW TO... GET MOVING ON A BOOK DAY

Suggesting that the whole school suspends the usual activities for a day (or week) and throws itself into a hectic round of book-based activities may sound a little daunting. But it has been and is being done with great success in schools, large and small, primary and secondary, all over the country.

All you need is a good idea, a bit of imagination and some careful planning. A Book Day can be as simple or as elaborate as you want to make it. It can cost as much or as little as you can afford.

Still not sure you could do it? Here are some ideas to get you going. We've gathered them from experienced organisers of Book Days who know they work.

## Book Day Basics

Most Book Days (or weeks) are a blend of the same activities: exhibitions, talks, demonstrations, films, games, competitions, making things, drama, dressing-up, quizzes, puppets, author visits, stories, workshops, bookselling. Displays, decorations all help to create atmosphere.

Work by the children as preparation for The Day and as follow-up increases the value and impact of the day enormously. When you discover how much a Book Day can contribute to what you are trying to achieve in the curriculum it justifies all the hard work and the disruption of the normal routine. Activities that encourage reading, writing, talking and listening, that develop a better understanding of what books have to offer, that are interesting, exciting and fun, that act as a stimulus to further reading and enquiry must be worth doing.

Time spent discussing ideas, researching possibilities, plotting and planning is never wasted. It's not too early to start NOW for a Book Day in the next school year.

The first thing to do is DECIDE ON A THEME. When you have got your theme, preferably one that can mix fact and fiction, go back to the beginning of Book Day Basics and see how you can adapt those activities to fit your theme.

## IT WORKS LIKE THIS—FOUR BOOK DAY OUTLINES

### Creepy Crawly Day

#### Visiting Experts

To talk, demonstrate (with films/slides/live specimens!) about spiders, snakes or any other form of creepy crawly. Try the local university, polytechnic, college or Natural History Society.

#### Mini-Safaris

Groups of children go out collecting/identifying insects etc. with teacher or local expert. Have lots of reference books on hand. Always involve the local Library or Schools Library Service in your Book Day if you can.

#### Crafty Creepy Crawlies/Bee Crafty

(Get the idea?)

Make snakes, spiders etc. out of junk. Craft books on hand for ideas.

#### Ant Act/Flea Fling

Drama Workshop with the emphasis on creepy movements. Caterpillar into butterfly? The ant hill?

#### Ugly Bug Ball/Butterfly Ball

Dress up/paint pictures/design or make costumes.

#### Hunt the Creepy Crawly

A competition: a sheet of silhouettes of a variety of creepy crawly insects and animals for identification. Use of reference books encouraged. Tie-breaker — invent a name for a Book Day Creepy Crawly.

#### Creepy Crawly Capers

Games of Beetle, Snakes and Ladders, Creepy Crawly Consequences with book titles or pictures.

### Cops and Robbers Day

#### Supersleuths

Book Detectives match pictures of book characters spread around the school with their authors and titles. A good lead-up activity to arouse interest in the days before the event.

#### A Fair Cop

Visits, talks, demonstrations, films from your local police force.

#### A Nice Set of Dabs

Making pictures from fingerprints.

#### Doing Time

Making models, collages, freizes on the theme of the day, or a well-liked story or stories in general.

#### A Likely Story

Story-telling, reading aloud, or tantalising tastes of exciting adventures.

#### Shadowing the Suspect

Puppet workshop on shadow puppets. Invent a puppet play.

#### Jailhouse Flicks

A book-based film show featuring Tomi Ungerer's *The Three Robbers* in the Weston Woods version. For catalogue and details of hire phone Henley-on-Thames (0491) 577033 and reverse the charges.

### Dungeons and Dragons Day

#### Dragonflies

Kite-making and flying (weather permitting).

#### Dragon Hoard

Make your own treasure — models, puppets, jewellery, mobiles from a Dragon Hoard of junk.

#### Fantasy Games

Contact local modelling and Dungeons and Dragons societies for demonstrations and exhibitions. Search out computer software.

#### Competitions

##### Friend or Foe?

Who ought to be put in a Dungeon?

If you needed rescuing from a dragon who would you choose?

Write 100 words for each answer.

##### Dragon Diner

Design a menu for a Hungry Dragon's Favourite Meal.

##### Dungeon Key

How many words of 3 or more letters can you make from the word Dungeon?

##### Merlin's Spell

A Find-the-Hidden-Word grid with a fantasy theme.

### A Great Reading Rumbustification

A nice general theme for fitting any book activity into.

**Write a Rumbustimenu** — in the form of a poem with bags of alliteration.

**Launch a new party food for Rumbustiproducts Ltd.** — insights into advertising.

**Invent a Rumbustiparty Game** — board games, ball games all with full rules and details for playing.

**Rumbustienterprises** — visits from local craft workers who demonstrate their skills — pottery, book binding, lace-making. . .

**Things to Do — on a Rumbustifun Sheet** How many words can you find in Rumbustification.

Cut out and colour a book mark.

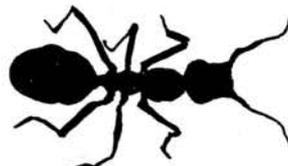
Picture quizzes.

Design a Rumbustibadge.

Mixed-up book titles.



Drawings courtesy of Tameside Libraries & Arts.





### Whatever the Theme . . .

The trick as you can see is finding ways to turn the ordinary into the fabulous by adapting activities to fit a theme.

Your theme will give you a focus for the all important **BOOK LIST**. Display it in the classroom. Print it on give-away book marks.

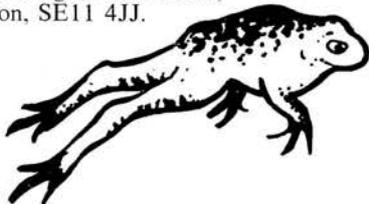
And for **DECORATION** — of at least part of the school, especially if a Book Fair is going to be part of your Book Day and you invite parents in the evening. Not everyone will want to go as far as Wellway School in Keynsham where they turned the gym into Captain Pugwash's ship, *The Black Pig*, for their Christmas Book Fair, complete with sails, portholes and bridge from which John Ryan addressed the audience, watched by life-size cutouts of Pugwash characters. But even a little ingenuity and effort can transform a school hall or library.

A **BOOK QUIZ** can be an exciting addition. Teams or individuals compete in answering questions on particular books. If author visits are part of your plans choose one of your author's books for the quiz.

**BOOK DAY NEWS**. Appoint a team of children, working with a member of staff or visiting expert to produce a Newspaper, Radio or TV programme about The Day. This can be as simple or as elaborate as time and resources allow.

**THE BOOK SAFARI** is a good focus for a Book Day on any theme. David Neville, an actor and writer, has a very lively one-man show which takes children on a colourful trail through the history of printed books from caveman, through Caxton to the first ever Puffin. Devised specially for 8-12 year olds it can be adapted by arrangement for particular audiences. It lasts about 45 minutes. ●

Write for details to David Neville,  
89 Kennington Park Road,  
London, SE11 4JJ.



Particular thanks for ideas included here to Tameside Libraries, George Spencer School, Nottingham, Wellway School, Keynsham.

## John Mason's NEW YORK DIARY



### Oldest art form

Each year in Knoxville, Tennessee, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS) draws together 1,000 people for its annual storytelling festival. In Toronto, 2,000 gather annually for the Toronto Festival of Storytelling, sponsored by the Storytellers School of Toronto which also runs courses and workshops throughout the year. 'Storytelling, one of the oldest, if not the oldest art form, is undergoing a tremendous revival today,' says Rafe Martin, owner of the Oxcart Bookshop in Rochester, New York, whose monthly storytelling sessions in his bookshop have become so popular — and profitable in terms of spin-off sales — that he has expanded the project into schools and libraries in the area. Americans, satiated with TV and movies, are rediscovering the ancient, simple satisfaction of listening to stories in the company of other humans. Weekly sessions in Toronto, called the '1,001 Friday Nights of Storytelling', have been going on for over four years and attract people from far and wide — even Europe and Australia. Anyone can come, and anyone (of whatever age) can tell a story. There is even a new breed of storyteller — the professional — who like the medieval bard travels the country telling stories for a fee. But most storytellers are still amateurs — booksellers, teachers, librarians and others — who do it as part of their job and because they love it, and because it turns people on to books. A tip from Rafe Martin: don't try to memorize a story word for word, but 'retell it in your own words . . . in this way, the story is recreated by you and grows and changes with each performance. This fluidity is part of the authentic life of traditional oral storytelling.'

### Ebullient

Le Var Burton, the actor who became famous as the young Kunte Kinte in *Roots*, is the ebullient host of a new series of 15 half-hour TV programmes about children's books, on public television stations. The series, called *Reading Rainbow*, is in a bright and chatty magazine format, with each segment centred around one main book and three or four other related books — 67 children's books in all. Some scenes were filmed in libraries and bookshops, others out of doors, and all involve children 'getting into' books. A children's magazine called *Reading Rainbow Gazette* is also available

to go with the series. The series was largely funded by a grant from Kellogg's — public (non-commercial) television in America being dependent on corporate and foundation sponsorship (as opposed to *network* television which is advertiser-financed). Now we've just heard the good news that Kellogg's has agreed to finance a further five programmes. News has also just arrived of Weston Woods's own television series to begin soon — a long-awaited development; sounds exciting.)

### Maverick

Shock-waves reverberated through the children's publishing community of New York when it was learned that George Woods, long-time children's review editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, had suddenly been removed from his job, and with no reason given. Though precise details remain a mystery, it appears that new management did not like his somewhat maverick style, and reassigned him to a less visible post. The question that now worries publishers is whether *The New York Times* may decide to decrease, or even eliminate altogether, its coverage of children's books, which would be a serious loss of a major national — even international — organ that is read by both professionals and the general public.

### Streamlining

Children's books recently lost ground in another instance of streamlining, involving the American Book Awards. Last year I wrote in these columns about the children's books award ceremony with its celebrity presenter and TV coverage. Now the Association of American Publishers has decided that the awards programme as it then was, with 27 different categories of winners, was too costly and complex to administer, and did little to sell books because the impact was diluted by having so many winners. Impressed by the success of Britain's Booker Prize, they sent a team to England to investigate, and have now decided that this year there will be just three winners — for fiction, nonfiction, and best new writer — with each receiving \$10,000 (instead of \$1,000 as previously). Clearly this makes a lot of sense for most publishers and for booksellers and the public, but children's books are unlikely to share any of the limelight. ●



# The Hans Christian Andersen AWARDS

In 1953 Erich Kastner, Astrid Lindgren and P. L. Travers joined with the late Jella Lepman, founder of the International Youth Library in Munich, to launch the **International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY)** 'to promote international understanding through children's books'.

In 1954 IBBY initiated the Hans Christian Andersen Award, presented every two years to the best children's writer selected by an international jury. An award for an illustrator was added soon after.

Patricia Crampton served as a member of that jury in 1976 and 1978 and this year is its President. Here she writes about some of the problems of making an international award.

In 1976 I truly believed that making a children's book award was one of those idyllic exercises to which international (i.e. political) bias did not apply. That naive idea was soon shattered. I was shocked too into a new awareness of the pigeon-holing we are all guilty of and the relatively limited outlook we all had on the literature of other nations. That year the British section of IBBY had nominated William Mayne and Edward Ardizzone for the award. Mayne was dismissed by the other jurors as being 'so typically English' that his understatements remained underground; Ardizzone was 'always the same' and very unexciting. Openmouthed, I found myself presented with a pair of earrings by one juror; later others told me they too had received appropriate gifts from the same source. My eyes had been opened, and but for my husband's solid presence, I think my spirits would have sunk beyond recall. The winners, however, were both excellent: Cecil Bødker and Tatiana Mavrina (USSR). But it was quite obvious that to the Western part of the world 'folkloric' art had ceased to appeal — the kind of cultural gap which makes international jury work difficult.

One of the biggest problems in serving on the international jury is Getting the Books. We receive an average of 10 books by each nominee and there are usually about 32 nominations — 320 books. The jury meets in April, so we hope to start receiving the books in the previous September — little enough time one would think. Inevitably the ideal is not achieved. 1978 provides a classic illustration. The Russian juror did not receive the works of Alan Garner and Charles Keeping, all despatched in good time, until long after the meeting had taken place. The work of the internationally popular Janusz Stanny reached scarcely any jurors and was reluctantly dropped from the list. The Spanish nominees decided on air freight as their method of despatch; jurors found themselves with invitations from Customs to come and pay for the release of the books at the airport. When claimed the books turned out to be only those of the author nominee, the illustrator's never arrived anywhere.

The host country for the judging does its best to make the books of all competitors available from library and embassy stocks.



HOMAGE TO HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN.

An engraving from *Punch* for January 10, 1857 at the time of Andersen's second visit to England.

Helpful though this is when only one or two jurors have not seen the books, it cannot compensate for non-receipt by the whole jury, nor for the mature consideration possible over several months. This year I received my last batch in January, an achievement in itself and the first time to my knowledge that all jurors have received all the books.

In 1978 the jury met in Tehran, shortly before the revolution. Another kind of problem faced us when three jurors were prevented from arriving, leaving us with only seven votes out of ten and without the representatives of three languages. The absence of even one juror on an international jury is important because our range is in any case not wide enough to cover all the cultures and languages involved. We have been particularly conscious of the lack of a juror from the Far East, not only for their sake — none of us even knows Japanese — but for ours; we need to learn about the Asian view of *our* children's books.

The Andersen jury, in my experience, is both serious and warm-hearted. Both virtues can become a liability. I remember the long discussion of the work of a rather mediocre Austrian writer who in one book tackled the Irish troubles as they affect England.

Simply because this is a serious subject our jury spent ages deciding how heavily the mediocrity and inaccuracy of the book weighed against the desirability of commending the subject matter. Some even thought that incorrect information was better than none! In 1978 a book about Lapland by a French writer came in for much discussion.

Our warm-hearted jury thought Lapland had been neglected in children's literature and the book should therefore be considered very seriously (it was rather a good book in fact). Luckily the absent juror, Kaija Salonem, had sent notes and it appeared that, though an excellent piece of literature, the book had nothing to do with Lapland!

So what is 'fair'? Should we stick to excellence as the first criterion? (I think that in fairness, ultimately, to all children we should.) Or should we to some extent at least cause the award to move around as a sort of congratulation for progress or to show our sympathy for effort (not the same thing!)? Should we broaden the scope of the awards?

And what can we do about the language problem? This year, well in advance of our meeting, I have written to jurors suggesting that, for the languages they do not know, they find two experts: one of their own nationality, one with the same nationality as the nominated writer, let's say Japanese, both of whom speak both languages. The one sharing their own language can help to produce a comparative criticism of the books, the other can provide useful information about the contribution made by the writer in question to Japanese children's literature. This is not easy to achieve. Why should busy people give up their time reading ten children's books for free? But at least it is worth aiming at.

A response to my request to jurors to begin with discussion of criteria in advance of the meeting has come from Maurice Saxby of Australia who writes: 'With Ana Maria Machado, I believe that a writer's award should value 'the literary quality of the text'; but then I have listened to earnest debates as to what constitutes literary merit. I believe that literature explores, with integrity, some area of human experience . . . in James Joyce's words, the work should have 'unity, harmony and radiance' . . .'

Other phrases from other jurors in the past remain with me. Of Paula Fox, 'a child can grow with every book'; of Alan Garner, 'for these three pearls alone (the Stone Book sequence) he would deserve the prize'. (A language problem overcome there — the juror was Iranian.) and 'the books must open a window for the child'.

Looking back, with all the problems, the results we arrived at seem valid. Just sometimes it is difficult to understand how we did it. ●

## IBBY

In October last year IBBY celebrated its 30th year of existence. There are now National Sections in 49 countries and Individual Members in a further 8 countries and territories.

As well as being a constant focus for international opinion and information on children and books, IBBY organises an international conference every two years. The papers and proceedings of the 18th Congress, held in Cambridge in 1982, **Story in a Child's Changing World**, are available from Colin Ray, Tan-y-Capel, Bont Dolgafan, Llanbrynmair, Powys SY19 7BB, £5.25 post free. (Well worth having.)

IBBY also carries out projects; notably at the moment research into books for handicapped children and fundraising for the IBBY Third World Book Fund.

Patricia Crampton, a distinguished translator of children's books and an active member of British IBBY, has written an **Introduction to the History and Work of IBBY**, available, post free, from Robert Leeson, 18 McKenzie Road, Broxbourne, Herts EN10 7JH, 65p.

# SOUND & VISION

## Robin of Sherwood is back

Robin Hood lives at the centre of a network of record, legend and myth; so many stories surround him that it's hard to distinguish between fact and fiction any more. Poems, songs, plays and stories about goings-on in the greenwood abound; Hollywood got into the act 50 years ago with Errol Flynn playing the dashing English folk hero who now has an international reputation.

Which makes it all the more surprising that we haven't seen Robin on our television screens for nearly a quarter of a century. Richard Carpenter, writer of such popular TV series as *Catweazle*, *The Ghosts of Motley Hall*, *Smuggler*, and *Dick Turpin* has changed all that. His six part version of the Robin Hood story *Robin of Sherwood* (produced by HTV and Goldcrest) begins on Saturday, April 7th at 7.00pm (ITV).

**Tony Bradman** went to talk to him about it.

Richard Carpenter started his working life as an actor. It was the success of his first writing job — he had the idea for *Catweazle* — that led to a complete career change to television scriptwriting. But why Robin Hood?

'I just thought it was time to do it again. After 25 years our ideas of how to portray a hero like this on television have changed, but the last series, the one which starred Richard Greene, is still being shown around the world.'

How different a Robin Hood are we going to see on our screens, then?

'I think it's slightly ridiculous to imagine Robin and his men as 35 or 40 year olds. I've made them 18 to 23, and it's at that age when people tend to be rebellious. Young people do extraordinarily rash things, and they do have a keener sense of justice. They tend to see things in black and white and act accordingly, which often may not be a bad thing. Seeing things in grey, vague terms can be a cop-out.'

'Anyway, in the series Robin is 20 and Marion is 17. It's a very vital young cast, and they do all their own swordfights and swinging through trees.'

There is a fair amount of violence in the series. 'Will Scarlet, for example, is a very tough character. In the first episode he kills 17 people. The fight on the log between Little John and Robin is no laughing matter, either; it's a fight to the death, and Robin realises that Little John is in the grip of a magical spell. That's what the series is like — lots of fights and action but very realistic. But we stress that Robin Hood kills very reluctantly and only when he has to.'

Little John in the grip of a magical spell? That's another dimension to the legend that Richard Carpenter has added — or, he suggests, perhaps restored.

'The early medieval period, when Robin was active was a very superstitious time. Other English hero legends — King Arthur, Hereward the Wake — include magic and sorcery; it seemed only right that there should be some in Robin's story too. Besides, I'm very keen on sword and sorcery which, I think, gets us away from things like science fiction and into a more romantic world.'

The traditional villains the Sherriff of Nottingham and Sir Guy of



Still from *Robin of Sherwood* (Michael Praed), an HTV/Goldcrest co-production.

Gisburne are joined by evil, devil-worshipping Baron de Belleme, skilled in the black arts. Robin's link with magic is made through a character whose influence permeates England and its folklore but who has been largely forgotten. 'Herne the Hunter god of the forest was an old English folk god, related to the Green Man and its associated legends. The Cerne Abbas giant is really Herne, and his name survives in many place names like Herne Bay and Herne Hill. He's a very powerful part of the Englishness of the programmes. In a way he's a fertility God, and he's related in my mind to the eternal spring like quality of the Robin Hood stories. They always seem to be happening in May, and they're young people in the spring of their lives. Marion can even be seen as a May Queen in some ways.'

'Robin in fact becomes Herne's adopted son, and Herne is the source of most of the magic in the programmes. The other main theme draws on the story of the silver arrow, the silver arrow which is a potent symbol of resistance to the norman invader.'

Sorcery, magic, politics, sex(?), violence, action-packed adventure. What more could you ask for family viewing on a Saturday night?

*Robin of Sherwood*, Richard Carpenter's own adaptation of the series for Puffin is reviewed in this issue of BfK.



Letty (Vicki O'Keefe) in an uncharacteristically dependent pose with house parents Aunt Margaret and Uncle James (played by Alison Kay and Brian Croucher).

### Meet Letty Boot

Letty is the lively, sparky, wheelchair-bound central character in a new series from TVS. The first of six 30 minute episodes is scheduled to start on March 28th at 4.25. Anna Home commissioned the series. Avril Rowlands wrote it. She also produced the Puffin version *Letty* (0 14 03.1616 7, £1.25) published to coincide with transmission.

The book, like Letty, is full of fun. She tells her own story of life at Meadowbank Children's Home where her bright ideas (herself as the guy in a 'Penny for the guy' expedition; starting up the Letty Boot detective agency) lead to comic disasters and exciting adventures. Among the laughs and the thrills there's a reflection of the many sides of life in a children's home and in a wheelchair.



### A New Cult?

Gerry Anderson's *Terrahawks*, launched onto TV last autumn by London Weekend, is (we are told) attracting the same kind of cult following as its legendary predecessor, *Thunderbirds*. A second series will be shown later this year and a third is in the making.

Meanwhile Sparrow publish the official tie-in novelisation by Jack Curtis (0 09 934240 5, £1.25) in which young fans can relish at leisure the story of how Dr. 'Tiger' Ninestein and his elite fighting force defend the world (again!) against ruthless aggressors.

### In View Soon . . . Something for Secondaries

Turn them on to sophisticated thrillers via LWT's five week *Raymond Chandler* series. Multi-million dollar production; already 'a winner' in the States. (March).

or classic detection via *Sherlock Holmes* in a 13 part series from Granada. (April).

or swashbuckling adventure via Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae* in a Columbia/HTV co-production. 'Star-studded cast'. Penguin have the tie-in. (Late March).

*Fraggle Rock* fans can read about the adventures of Jim Henson's Muppet-style characters in three tie-in books, each by a different author and illustrator. Hardbacks from Allison and Busby (£4.50), paperback from Sphere (£1.50). ●

# HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN



1805-1875

ERIK

**'My life has been a beautiful fairy tale, rich and happy.'**

With these words Andersen described his own life. He was born amidst the squalor which you can find today only in the poverty stricken villages of the Third World. His father was a journeyman shoemaker who patched the shoes of those so poor that they often could not pay him. His mother was a washerwoman who stood in the cold river washing the clothes of others. But in the fairy tale it is often the poorest of boys who marries the princess! In the fairy tale good fortune can be the lot of those born the meanest. At the end of *The Ugly Duckling* Andersen says: 'It does not matter that one has been born in the henyard as long as one has lain in a swan's egg.' Even as a small child Andersen believed that he was different, not like other children, and it was true — he had lain in a swan's egg.

Many people took an interest in the extraordinary child, but most thought that learning a trade was enough of an advancement for the washerwoman's son. Little Hans Christian did not agree; in the fairy tale of his life there was no room for his becoming a tailor or a carpenter.

Fourteen years old, with little money in his pocket, he set out from his native town of Odense for Copenhagen. True to the heroes of romance and the fairy tale, the goal he sought was fame. Foolish perhaps, but had his ambition been less, he would never have succeeded. It was that very fever of ambition burning within him which made people help him, even, as in a fairy tale, the King of Denmark.

But ambition was not enough, hard work and — terribly important — the ability to overcome defeat and not to be destroyed by it was necessary too. The latter was the hardest, for almost any criticism of his work reduced Andersen to tears. As a child he had described the poet's lot in these words: 'First you suffer so terribly, and then you become famous.' He was to achieve fame, but he was also to learn that suffering did not stop because of this.

He was thirty years old when the first little pamphlet appeared containing five fairy tales, among them *The Tinderbox*, *Little Claus and Big Claus* and *Thumbelina*. He

had already written plays, poetry and novels, but it was his fairy tales which would attain for Andersen the success he had dreamt of when he was a little barefoot urchin in Odense.

The first fairy tales were written 'for children in such a manner that adults could listen to them as well'. (I wish that this sentence would be kept in mind by all authors who write for children.) The later fairy tales and stories were composed 'for adults but written in such a manner that children could listen to them as well'.

In an Andersen story Dame Fairy Tale herself appears and says: 'One ought to call everything by its right name, and if one doesn't dare to do it in everyday life, then at least one should do it in a fairy tale'. This may sound like nonsense to those who believe that such tales are merely idle rubbish created to amuse children. True, the fairy tale contains plenty of fantasy, witches, giants and evil dwarfs but its backbone is reality, truth. The purpose of the fairy tale is to express something which needs to be told in such a manner that it will be heard.

During the German occupation of Denmark an actor decided to read in public a story by Andersen called *The Evil King*. The Nazis had no doubt about whom the evil king was supposed to portray, and the actor found himself in jail. The little fairy tale had contained enough truth to offend the despot.

In fairy tales animals are often given speech but that inanimate objects — such as darning needles, collars or an iron — also

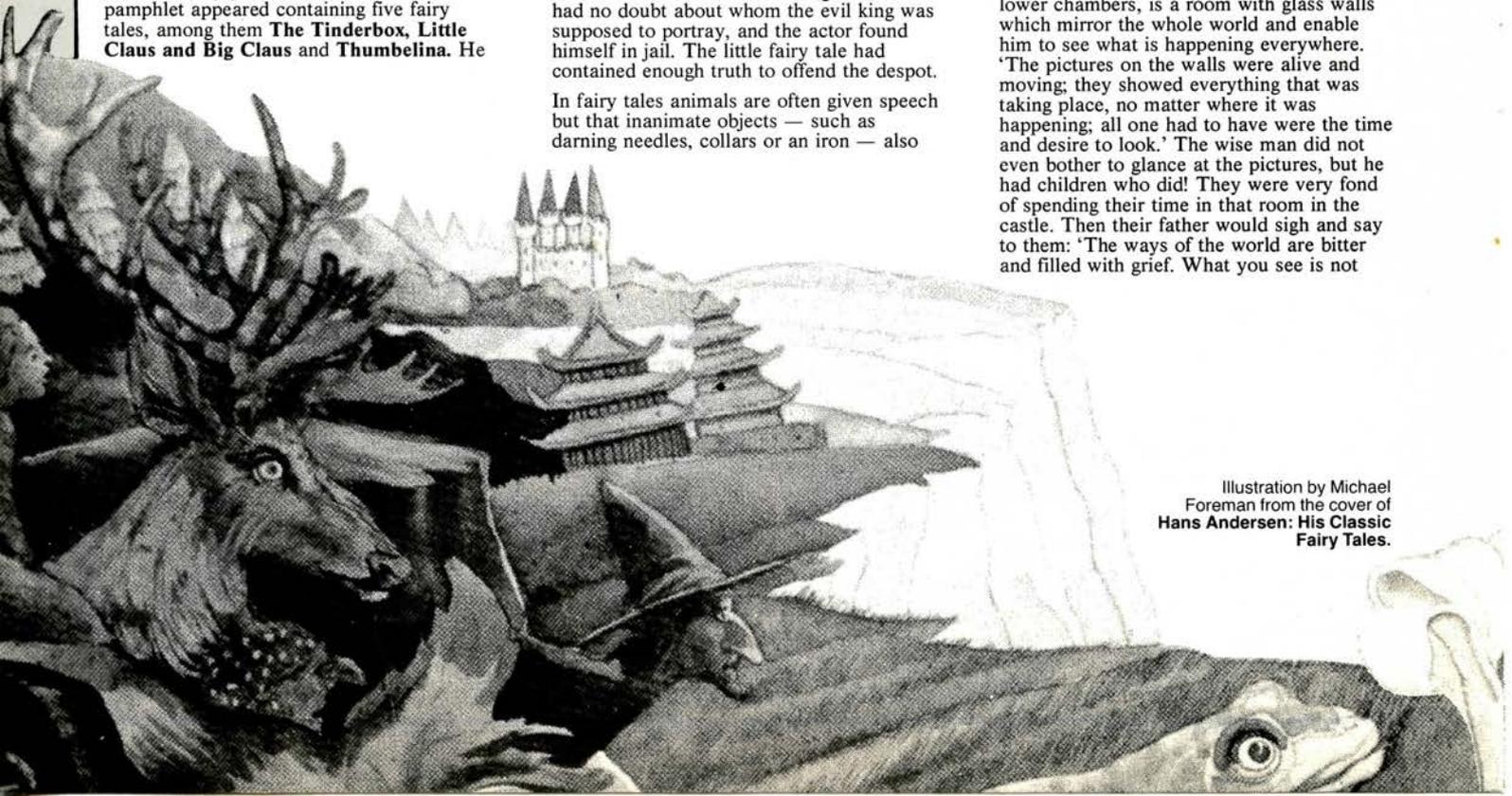
possess a soul is, I believe, Andersen's own discovery. He made them speak with human voices about their experiences as objects.

The darning needle has only the memory of a needle and the ambitions of such a humble tool. He deals in a similar manner with animals: a duck does not question that fatness is beauty any more than a rat would question that a larder is paradise. They have desires and are frustrated when they cannot fulfil them, but their desires are reasonable for their kind. Therefore, they are at times tragic and sometimes funny, but they are never sweet and sentimentalized.

Like many authors in the nineteenth century, Andersen was fascinated by science and technology. In 1850 he foresaw that travel by air would eventually surpass other forms of transportation. In one little sketch he has the future citizens of America who are visiting the 'old countries' clutch in their hands the best-seller of the day — *Europe Seen in Eight Days*.

But it still came as a surprise to me, when I translated a fairy tale called *The Philosopher's Stone*, to find that he had an opinion about children and television as well. In that tale 'the wisest man in the world' lives in a castle where, in one of the lower chambers, is a room with glass walls which mirror the whole world and enable him to see what is happening everywhere. 'The pictures on the walls were alive and moving; they showed everything that was taking place, no matter where it was happening; all one had to have were the time and desire to look.' The wise man did not even bother to glance at the pictures, but he had children who did! They were very fond of spending their time in that room in the castle. Then their father would sigh and say to them: 'The ways of the world are bitter and filled with grief. What you see is not

Illustration by Michael Foreman from the cover of *Hans Andersen: His Classic Fairy Tales*.



# HAUGAARD writes about a unique and original storyteller

reality, for you watch it from the safe world of childhood and that makes all the difference.' Indeed it does; reality and what appears on the TV screen are not the same, for you are merely seeing it, not participating in and experiencing what is being shown.

Books written for children are relatively new, only a couple of hundred years old and the fairy tale is much older than that. It is probably the most ancient form of literature, but just because it was a little late in being written down this might be hard to prove. But does the fairy tale have anything to say to the modern child? After all, the world has changed; grandmother who used to tell such tales in no longer sitting in the chimney corner.

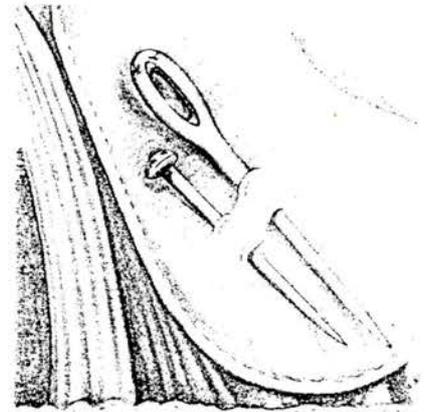
The literature which amuses the child of today is derived from the fairy tale. Science fiction deals, if not with witches and giants, with archetypes; it is a member of the family though not quite a respectable one. Are Professor Tolkien's books not fairy tales? I believe that the fairy tale fills a need in a child's life, and only if that need ceases to be will the fairy tale vanish. We grown-ups often forget what it was like to be a child. If you recall your childhood, you will become aware how much its world resembled the fairy tale's. Good fairies could appear suddenly and save you, just as ogres could pop up too. Sometimes persons whom you loved and knew well — like your own mother — could be the good fairy and a witch almost at the same time. The wonderful and the horrible were never far apart, and so much that happened was, like magic, past understanding.

The child conceives of its world as surrounded by a wall containing a gate which leads to the much larger world of the adults. Through that gate he will have to pass, and the child both longs for and is frightened by this. In the land of grown-ups things may be acquired by a mere act of will, whereas a child can only wish for things. How fervently one could wish then! The gift of three wishes which the good fairy often bestowed on the hero of the fairy tale was meaningful when one was a child.

If children like fairy tales because they resemble their own world and portray their situation, why do adults like them too? I think it is because the fairy tale deals in archetypes, it is a world of good and evil

without those embarrassing shades in between. Good triumphs and evil is summarily punished. This is refreshing in a world as sophisticated as ours, and it is pleasant to return through the gate to the land of one's childhood. But suddenly one can sometimes wonder if the fairy tale is not closer to the truth than all the books one has ploughed through since one was deemed a grown-up. Are evil and good relative, or are they absolute as in a fairy tale? Those who perished in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany and Siberia would probably have tended to agree with the fairy tale.

'Once upon a time' is no time, just as east of the sun and west of the moon, or the end of the world, is no place. In reality, however, it means 'at all times, in all places'. It is a declaration announcing that what you are going to hear is the truth — both in time and space. And everyone, be he king or beggar, needs to hear the truth once in a while at least, and that is why I most fervently hope that the fairy tale will always be with us. ●



Anderson's own invention: collars, darning needles, pins — all with souls. Illustrated here by Michael Foreman.

**Erik Haugaard**, born in Copenhagen, now lives in Ireland. A passionate advocate of Andersen he writes, and lectures on the subject frequently on both sides of the Atlantic. As well as translating *The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories of Hans Andersen* (Gollancz, 0 575 01776 7, £9.95) regarded as a definitive edition, he has written four books for children.

**Hans Andersen: His Classic Fairy Tales** (Gollancz, 0 575 02188, £6.95) is a selection of eighteen tales from the collection, illustrated by Michael Foreman.





# ANDERSEN IN PICTURES

## The Wild Swans and The Little Mermaid: the two newest picture book versions of Andersen stories.

Naomi Lewis, whose version of *The Wild Swans* is the inspiration for Angela Barrett's illustrations in the new Benn edition, is a greatly respected Andersen translator and commentator. Here she talks about this story and about Andersen's particular qualities.

When I was making my selection for the Puffin edition I didn't include *The Wild Swans*. I was limited to a dozen and I wanted to put in the more important stories and one or two that I thought were not well enough known, like *The Goblin and the Grocer*. I left it out because at the time I simply thought of it as one that like several of his earlier stories – *Big Claus and Little Claus*, *The Tinder Box* – were based on tales he had heard from the women when they were spinning or gathering crops. But when I looked again at this fascinating story I found it certainly had the Andersen touch. He makes the story his own. The most interesting thing to me is the flight, when Elisa is carried through the clouds by her brothers, the enchanted swans. It's one of the great passages in fairy tale literature. Andersen, of course, had never been in the sky, but in a later story, *The Millenium*, or *A Thousand Years Hence* (the title varies according to the translation) he describes what will happen in a thousand years. He said there will be machines flying, people will book a hotel in Europe from America. The only bit he got wrong was that it would be in a thousand years; it happened in a good deal less than a hundred from when he wrote. He was always interested in modern inventions. I think he saw them as an extension of magic. The flight in *The Wild Swans* is a marvellous anticipation of the thing you feel in an aeroplane above the clouds, watching the clouds change shape. It's like that other flight in *The Snow Queen* with Kay and the Snow Queen; they fly up in the sky with the wolves howling and frost crackling.

Andersen was a wonderful storyteller. I think *The Snow Queen* is his greatest story; it's an extraordinary tale; you can find in it what I think is his instinct for the lost novels he never wrote.

*The Wild Swans* is an early story and it contains a great deal that is in many of the most famous stories. It's incipiently *The Little Mermaid*, *The Snow Queen*, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* – and all the ones that show landscape and seasons.

The theme of the story, salvation through hardship and endurance, was one of his great themes. He knew it himself; it was one of his own. The central thread of the story, a princess who must remain silent until she has completed the task of weaving shirts for her brothers from freshly gathered nettles in order to rescue them from enchantment as swans, is one of great anguish. But in the story there is an absolutely beautiful evocation of the seasons and of the landscape. If you read through Andersen you discover the Danish landscape – the marvellous woodlands in spring, and the sea, of course, which is everywhere around the islands. In *The Wild Swans* there's a wonderful description of night in the woods with the glow worms and the fireflies. Andersen didn't write poetic prose, but there's a tremendous amount of poetry in his stories.





Naomi Lewis



Angela Barrett, photo by Mike Owen.

## Cover artist LISBETH ZWERGER



Photo by Nancy Gorbics

Angela Barrett, the artist whose illustrations appear in *The Wild Swans*, claims she 'just fell into illustrating children's books'. She was a final year student at the Royal College of Art when Benn discovered her. *The Wild Swans*, though not her first book to be published was the first book she did for Benn and she finished it in 1981. Published first was *The King, the Cat and the Fiddle* with a story by Christopher Holt. 'I need good writing to spark me off,' she says. 'And I'm quite obsessive about going back to the text and making it right. I spent six months on *The Wild Swans*. I agonized over composition and made far too many rough drawings. I deliberately didn't look at any other illustrators' versions of Andersen. I'm glad I didn't, it would have demoralised me. When I'd finished and I did see some *Wild Swans* I found we all seem to have illustrated the same bits. Some of the effects, viewpoints I'd thought were mine and original, I found others had discovered too. Like all artists, I'd do it differently if I were starting now. I think I'd do it better.'

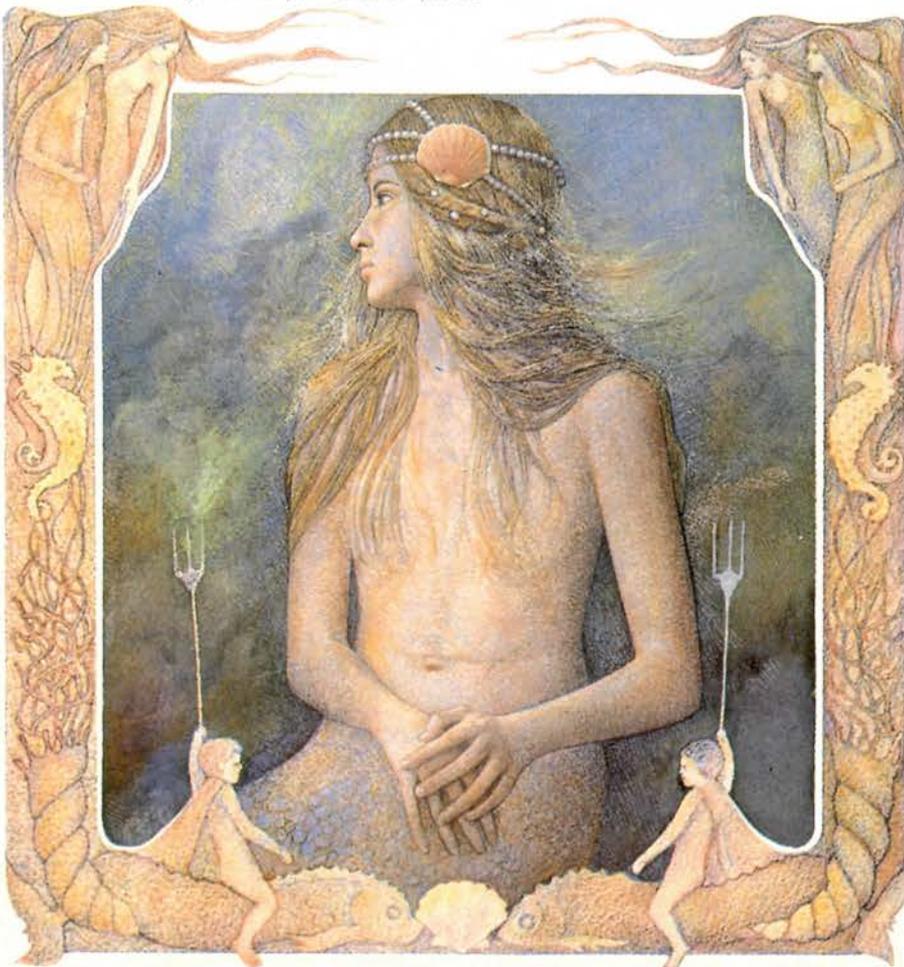
*The Wild Swans*, Benn, 0 510 00123 8, £4.95 (published April)

*The Little Mermaid* is a Canadian co-edition, published by Methuen. The story is retold by Margaret Maloney with illustrations by Lazlo Gal. It is perhaps the best-known of all Andersen stories; the classic tale of the beautiful little mermaid who falls in love with a prince, becomes human for his sake and, although he does not return her love, sacrifices herself for him.

Margaret Maloney is currently head of the Lillian Smith and Osborne collection of Early Children's Books, a library of rare and out of print Canadian children's books, and is an acknowledged expert in children's literature. She lives in Toronto.

Lazlo Gal was born in Hungary but has lived in Canada since he was a child. He is one of the best-known children's book illustrators in Canada and won the Canada Council's Children's Book Prize in 1981 for his illustrations of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. For *The Little Mermaid* he took as his inspiration the statue of Andersen's classic character which stands on the edge of the harbour in Copenhagen. ●

*The Little Mermaid*, Methuen, 0 416 46540 4, £5.95



Lisbeth Zwerger whose illustration from Andersen's *The Swineherd* appears on our cover, was born in Vienna in 1954. Since her first book appeared, eight years ago, she has won international acclaim: three times a winner of the Graphic Prize at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, a gold medal at the International Biennial of Illustration in Bratislava, several Austrian State Book Awards, and twice included in the New York Times 10 Best Illustrated Books Awards. This year she is the Austrian nomination for the Hans Andersen Awards.

As a child she clearly showed artistic talent; but at art school became disillusioned and had all but given up when a young Englishman, also studying in Vienna, showed her some volumes of Arthur Rackham from the English Library. Brought up on fairy tales she immediately responded to Rackham's vision. She started work again, this time in illustration. Soon after, by another coincidence, the owner of a large fashionable gallery in Vienna, putting on an exhibition of her father's work, had some space left. Lisbeth's pictures filled it and sold immediately. The owner of Austria's Neugebauer Press wrote to her. 'I think you'd better go and see him,' her mother insisted, knowing her shy, modest daughter needed a push. From that visit came the first of ten illustrated fairy tales. Her books now appear in 17 languages and she works exclusively for Neugebauer Press (distributed in this country by A. and C. Black.)

She produces one book a year, starting in the winter and finishing in the spring. At present she is working on another Andersen, *The Emperor's Nightingale*. After many rough drawings to find the eleven or so pictures for the book, the final paintings, done to size, are worked in a combination of water soluble inks (available only in Vienna) and water colours, with an outline in brown ink. She spends months on one picture and there are 'lots of failures', when the colours go wrong and the whole thing has to be abandoned. According to her husband, that same young Englishman, she hates being pressured but works best when a deadline is looming.

Most in sympathy with the classic and traditional subjects she is not attracted by contemporary stories. Her most 'modern' work so far has been for O'Henry's turn-of-the-century story, *The Gift of the Magi*. Her publisher thought it would be 'good for her' but it wasn't something she would have chosen. With so many fairy tales available you might think Lisbeth Zwerger would be spoiled for choice. The trouble is she doesn't want to do stories about little girls who, if they are good, grow up to marry handsome princes. With that limitation, she's rapidly running out. ●



## ANDERSEN AND THE ENGLISH

**Brian Alderson** surveys attempts to translate Andersen in words and pictures.

When Patrick Hardy asked me to undertake the new edition of Andrew Lang's *Colour Fairy Books* for Kestrel, one of the things that we had to decide was what to do about Andrew Lang's texts. For although these twelve books make up a great treasury of the world's folk tales they preserve them in a form that is often stilted when compared to the fluency of the told story, and may often sound cumbersome to the listener in the late twentieth century.

Nowhere is this better exemplified than in Lang's treatment of Hans Christian Andersen, who enters the series in the fourth volume, *The Yellow Fairy Book*. Here, and in its immediate successor, the *Pink*, Lang includes some sixteen tales from Andersen — about whose nationality he seems uncertain. For although at one point he refers to him as 'our Danish author', he also calls him 'Herr Andersen' and specifically states that his translator, Alma Alleyne, has worked from German versions of the stories. As a result, the texts of Andersen in the original *Yellow* and *Pink* fairy books do not measure up to the character (or sometimes even the structure) of their source stories. Thus, as with many other stories in the series, we decided to pitch Andrew Lang (and Alma Alleyne) overboard and to introduce versions which we hoped would have a more authentic flavour to them.

Andersen is a particularly good example of this need for editorial tinkering because, unlike the anonymous tellers of the folk tales, he exerts a powerful and intensely personal influence on his stories. His Danish *Eventyr* may carry about them the hints of a traditional past, but they are impregnated with his individual character as a storyteller. Only rarely before the *Eventyr* began to appear in 1835 had anyone allowed the voice of the storyteller to emerge with such assurance in a children's book (look at the first sentences of the first story, *The Tinder Box*), and never had that voice had the range of inflection that Andersen commanded. Conversation, irony, straight narrative, throwaway asides — the stories possess a battery of effects that are the property of a live narrator confronted by a live audience. If an editor or a translator does not recognise this fundamental quality in Andersen's stories then he is selling both his author and his readers short.

In working on the Lang 'Fairy Books' therefore (where I decided to do the translation myself), and in considering what to say about versions of Andersen that I meet up with as a reviewer, my reaction is governed by one factor only: truth to the original. Truth, that is, as far as can be managed in the impossible business of converting fluent, near-colloquial Danish Andersen into an English equivalent.

I realise that this is not a very fashionable attitude (and never has been). I notice, for instance, in the 1983 *Signal Review of Children's Books* that that eminent editor, Judy Taylor, can happily praise the pictures and dismiss the typography of a couple of Andersen picture books, without commenting at all on what has happened to the original raw material; and I notice that the annotator (Elaine Moss?) of the *Good Book Guide to Children's Books* (1983) can endorse as 'sensitive' Naomi Lewis's truncated text of *The Snow Queen* without questioning if massive abridgments of this masterly tale are legitimate. (I draw a veil over the rubbish in that same annotation about Errol Le Cain's deeply *insensitive* illustrations.)

Nevertheless, it was in the hopes of justifying a critical stance which makes Andersen



From 'Hans, the Mermaid's Son' in *The Pink Fairy Book*.



Philip Gough's drawing for 'Thumbelina' in the Naomi Lewis Puffin.

paramount that I wrote for IBBY a booklet on what the poor man has suffered at the hands of his English admirers. In that all-too-brief essay and survey I tried to show how his genius has had to struggle against dull and thoughtless translators, and how his incomparable style has too often been obtruded upon by Le Cain-like gentlemen with clever-paintbrushes. But even though I list in this booklet some ninety-three English editions of Andersen in one form or another there are precious few that I would care to recommend to the discriminating readers of *Books for Keeps*.

Without doubt the first choice (also, interestingly, just about the cheapest) is the collection of twelve tales translated by Naomi Lewis and illustrated by Philip Gough: *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* (Puffin, 0 14 03.0333 2, 95p). This little book is the outcome of many years' reflection on the nature of Andersen's genius, and it is put into English by a writer with a wonderful ear for the equivalencies of English prose — so that the rest of us, who are working too quickly or are too close to the edge of our knowledge sound jerky or unnatural by comparison. (This, I think, is one of the things that worries me about Erik Haugaard's version used in the *Classic Fairy Tales* illustrated by Michael Foreman. When it first came out I welcomed Haugaard's huge, complete Andersen (too) enthusiastically — partly because he made accessible so many stories that had never been properly translated before. On maturer reflection however, and after more experience, I find blemishes in the book — especially the tendency to expand phrases — which show up uneasily alongside such versions as those by Naomi Lewis.)

Of the other small collections that have many commendable features I would pick

Stephen Corrin's often very alert fourteen tales in *Ardizzone's Hans Andersen* (Deutsch, 0 233 96996 9, £5.95) and Reginald Spink's reliable, workmanlike versions in the 'Children's Illustrated Classic' series (Dent, 0 460 02739 5, £2.50). It would be nice too to tell readers to go out and buy the largish selections that were translated by R. P. Keigwin (four volumes published by Edmund Ward) and by Paul Leyssac (a delightful version published by Macmillan in 1937) but these labours of love are long out of print. The same is true of L. W. Kingsland's translation for two books put out by the Oxford University Press, but some of his work has been brought back in *The Nightingale and Other Tales* (Worlds Work, 0 437 23062 7, £5.95), although here it is accompanied by crude and unacceptably intrusive illustrations by Mary Tozer.

For it is another corollary of my criterion for judging editions by Andersen that the illustrator should not overpower Andersen's own voice. This was something that he was nervous about himself, I suspect, since the early editions of his tales were all unillustrated and since he later chose draughtsmen like Pedersen and Frolich whose work harmonised so well with his own style. Today though, in the picture-book editions, there is hardly one where translation and pictures add up to a satisfying whole. Some interesting items have appeared in a longish series of landscape format picture books put out by Kaye & Ward, who do make an effort to print complete stories in standard translations, but the coloured illustrations are often very quirky (James's translation of *The Fir Tree*, 0 7182 0891 9, £3.50) illustrated by Otto S. Svend is perhaps the best example in print of this series at its most reliable). Rarely though do you find anything with the quality and care and affection that went into Nancy Ekholm Burkert's *The Nightingale*, with its matching translation by Eva Le Gallienne (Heinemann). But while so much dross — from Le Cain to Ladybird — flourishes, that truly 'sensitive' work is out of print.

In sum therefore, I find that I am recommending only about half-a-dozen of the sixty-odd books listed under 'Andersen' in the latest *Books in Print*, with perhaps half-a-dozen optional extras among the picture books. Is this, I wonder, seen by readers of *Books for Keeps* as a severe and unpractical thing to do, or is it (what I believe it to be) a rational attempt to do justice to a great writer?

Hesitantly, I also wonder whether a similar degree of selectivity might not be applied to less august children's books. The fat years, before Thatcher's Razor, encouraged a good deal of careless publishing and even more careless spending. A bit more rigour in deciding which books really are for keeps might well be welcome.

**The Yellow Fairy Book**, ed Brian Alderson, ill. Eric Blegvad Kestrel, 0 7226 5435 9, £7.50

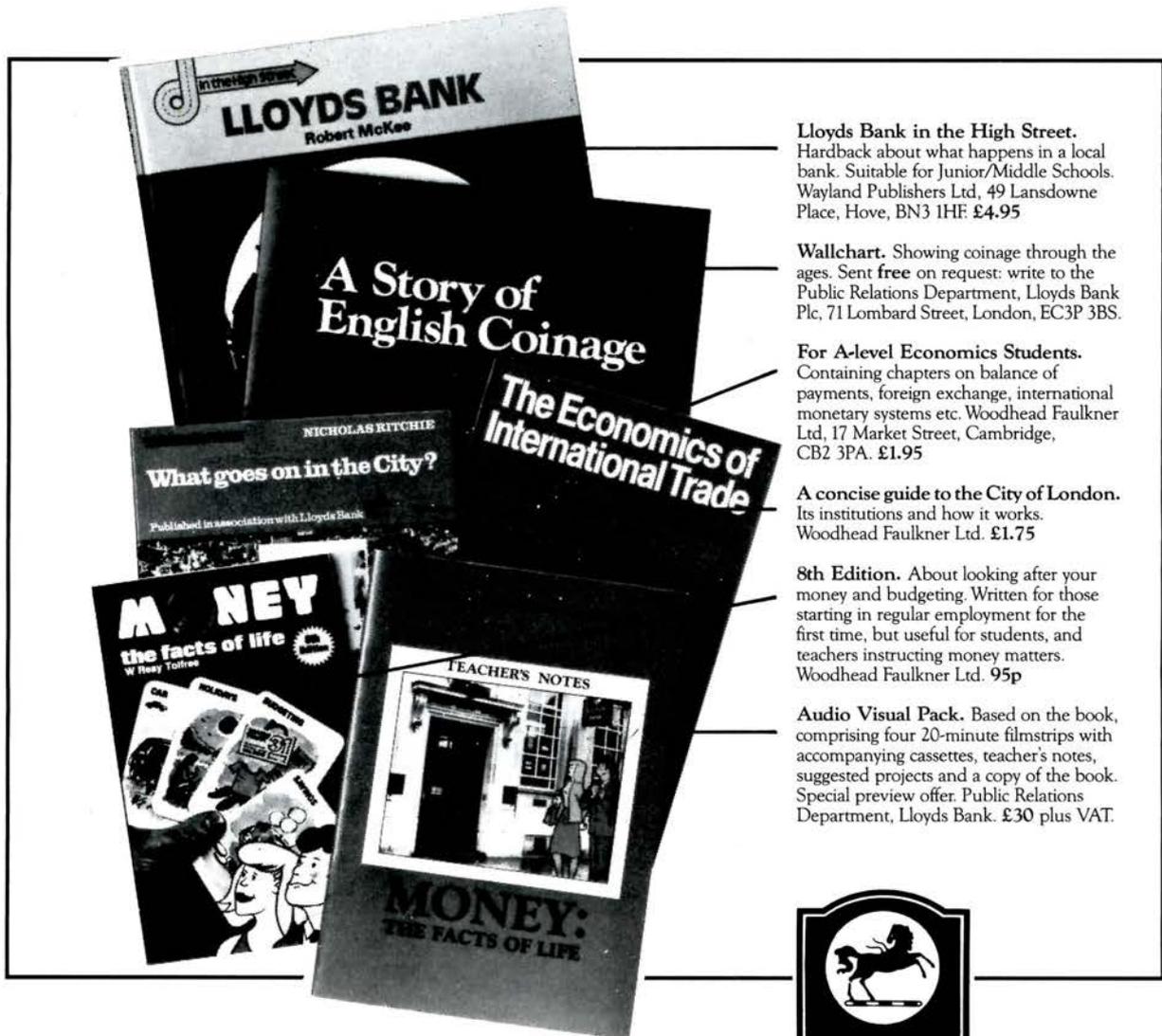
**The Pink Fairy Book**, ed Brian Alderson, ill. Colin McNaughton, Kestrel, 0 7226 5703 X, £7.50

Brian Alderson's booklet *Hans Christian Andersen and his Eventyr in England*, IBBY (British Section) 0 903838 03 6, is available from Chris Kloet, Tameside Libraries and Arts, Council Offices, Wellington Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancs OL6 6DL. Price, £4.00 post free.

# You can't know too much about money!

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## Lloyds Bank



## THE NEW PUFFIN CLUB

Things have been moving fast at Harmondsworth since Eunice McMullen became the new Puffin Club Manager last autumn. The New Puffin Club was launched on February 1st and its form and style may give a nasty jolt to the members of that exclusive band of Founder Puffineers. The Puffin Club of the eighties it is hoped will have something to offer to all sorts and conditions of children who are (or might be persuaded to be) interested in reading. The target for recruitment is schools — rather than middle-class homes. And the package includes direct selling of books (some at a discount) via the Puffins by Post book club.

### Eunice gives us the details

First of all Puffin Post has changed to a new large format and will be more colourful and open in its design. There will be a regular feature on an author or illustrator; Nina Bawden, Jan Pienkowski and Mike Rosen are the first three. All these authors are giving up a week of their time to work intensively in schools and libraries in a particular area. These Puffin Author Tours will be a regular feature to link with each new issue of Puffin Post.

The biggest change is that we are now a registered book club. There will be a regular four page, full colour insert going out to all members with **The Egg or Puffin Post**. The insert, Puffins by Post, offers some books at reduced prices as well as new books. Postage is free if four or more books are ordered.

As an alternative to the normal subscription of £2.50, Starter Packs containing £6 worth of books can be bought for £5 and membership is then free. (This is also available to existing members wishing to renew.)

We also have special deals for schools and libraries. They can all take out an annual subscription to either magazine for just £2. Copies can be ordered in bulk for 25p each (cover price 30p) provided there is a minimum order of ten: postage, of course, free. There is also a school membership. Individuals can join through their teacher (£1.25 each). For this they receive four issue of Puffin Post and a membership badge; they share the same membership number and magazines are posted in bulk. There must be a minimum school membership of ten.

If anyone has queries or wants information just contact me at the Puffin Club, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middx. (01 759 1984).

### The Annual Puffin Show

This year it's **The Fantastic World of Puffin Kingdom** and there will be plenty of Dungeons and Dragons-type activity at Chelsea Town Hall, 23 April - 5 May. Official opening by Dahl and Blake on Easter Monday and lots of other things to do and see and people to meet.

Send s.a.e. to Harmondsworth for detailed time-table.

### NEW FROM SIGNAL Signal Review 2

A selection of the best in children's publishing from 1983, edited by Nancy Chambers. (0 903355 14 0, £4.50 post free)

An exhibition based on the Review will be at the NBL from May 26 - 31, and then at the London Book Fair, the Barbican Centre, April 10 - 13.

### Poetry for Children

A selection of in-print hardback and paperback poetry books, made by Jill Bennett (for up to 8's) and Aidan Chambers (9-14's). Over 120 annotated titles. (0 903355 13 2, £1.95 post free)

Both lists available from The Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos. GL5 5EQ or The NBL, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

NBL Touring Exhibitions are also available based on both lists. For details apply to Andy Patterson at the NBL (01 870 9055).

### National Tell a Story Week

The Federation of Children's Book Groups is planning its annual orgy of storytelling and reading aloud which lasts from May 5th - 12th.

The theme this year is **Stories from Around the World**. The week will be launched in London at the Commonwealth Institute on May 5th. There will be storytelling (of course), drama, craft, competitions, fancy dress and lots of fun around stories and books. All welcome.

Details from Sue Cole, Aptonfields, Hounslow Green, Barnston, Near Dunmow, Essex CM6 3PP. (0371 82004).

Why not join in with an activity of your own?

### Something to think about?

**Making Literacy Purposeful** is the first Manchester Literacy Conference. April 26 and 27 at Didsbury School of Education, Manchester Polytechnic. 'Fourteen speakers, a practical orientation



### Travelling Booksellers

Surely some of the most determined and dedicated booksellers around must be those running mobile bookshops. Their concern to get books and children together and their love of what they are doing pushes them on in a job where no-one is going to make a fast fortune. Recently disaster struck Althea's Travelling Bookshop which has been making books available in the remoter parts of Cambridgeshire for two years.

Tony Hazzard, who, with Althea, set up and runs the bookshop, writes 'With the help of an unsuspected patch of black ice, our 25ft caravan and gaily-painted Sherpa van, along with several thousand assorted titles and two staff, plunged into a deep ditch beside the B1040 near St Ives in Cambridgeshire. Thanks to safety belts, I and our assistant Kate Brodrick (on the second-to-last day of her YTS placement) were unhurt, but the vehicles and stock are likely to be a write-off.

In its career to date the

Bookshop has covered all of Cambridgeshire and large parts of surrounding counties, visiting nearly 400 primary schools, fairs, playgroups, and conferences at the rate of up to ten a week, spreading the message that children's books are exciting. Welcomed everywhere by teachers, parents and best of all, children, it has not so far managed to cover its costs. But it has sold a lot of books that might not have found homes otherwise, as well as (we sincerely hope) giving an occasional boost to local bookshops whether school or high street based.

While salvage is sorted out the future remains unclear. Meanwhile the mobile bookselling torch is in the hands of among others Bob Cattell whose Greenwich Bookbus (run in concert with local authorities) has shown the way, Ian and Maria Barclay who continue to make headway against daunting odds in Mid-Wales with Bws Llyfrau and Christine Willison with her new Book Bug in Suffolk.'

Let's hear from any others of you out there.

aimed at teachers and extremely low cost' are promised. Details from Manchester Literacy Conference, School of Education, 799 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester M20 8RR.

### The Kathleen Fidler Award

The second winner of this award set up in memory of the Scottish children's author is **Elizabeth Lutzeier** for **No Shelter**.

The award is for a first novel for 8-12 year olds. Last year's winner, **Adrift**, by Allan Baillie was well reviewed and Blackie, who will be publishing **No Shelter** in September, think they have found another winner.

**No Shelter** tells the story of a boy and his baby sister struggling to survive in Germany during and immediately after the Second World War. The judges say, 'Although the story does not shy away from portraying the full horror of war, it does end on an optimistic note. It should provide much food for thought.' Elizabeth Lutzeier

was born in Manchester. In 1977 she married and moved to Berlin where she now lives with her husband and two children.

### Free Gifts from Hippo

Hippo books are working hard to make everyone more aware of their existence. At the end of March they will have available their very first catalogue and along with this they are offering free 4" Hippo stickers, Postman Pat bookmarks and a Hippo poster. To get your very own promotional package apply to Hippo Books, 10 Earlam St., London WC2 (01 240 5753).

### Join the Club: getting books to children

May 24th. An IBBY Seminar on bookclubs and bookselling for children. For librarians, teachers, publishers, authors, parents. At Birmingham Triangle Cinema (formerly the Arts Lab) 10.00-4.30. Details from Sheila Ray, Tan-y-Capel, Bont Dolgadafan, Llanbrynmair, Powys SY19 7BB. ●